

HAZARD

AND HEROISM

STORIES TOLD BY

G. A. HENTY

E. L. ARNOLD

L. C. A. F. MOCKLER

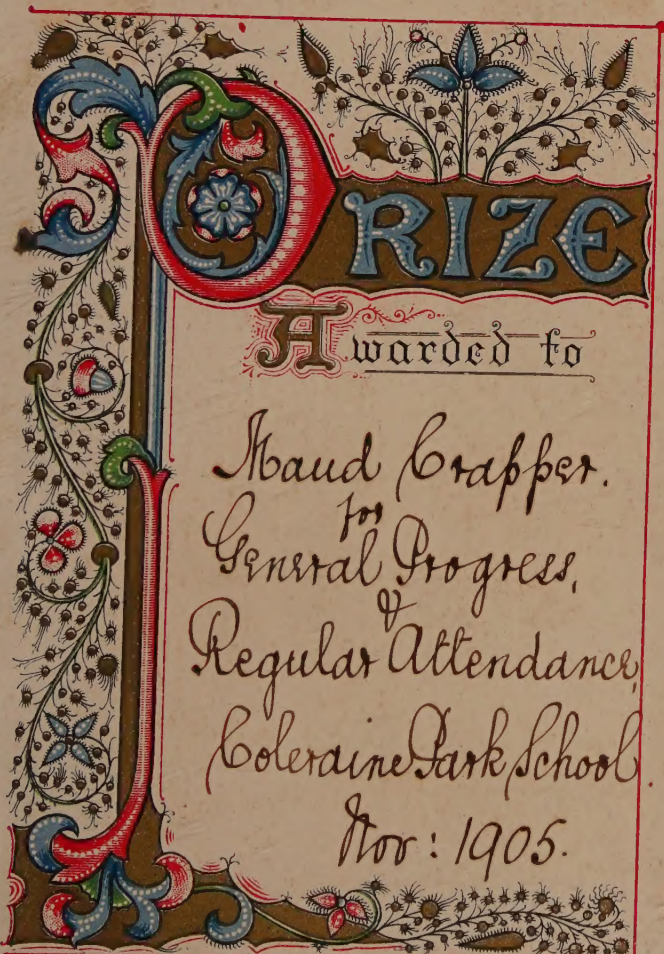
FERRYMAN

HAROLD BINDLOSS

LOUIS TRACY

tc tc





RIZE

Awarded to

Maud Grappet.
for
General Progress,
&
Regular Attendance,
Coleraine Park School.
Nov: 1905.

Hazard & Heroism



The astonished Englishman instinctively raised his hands above his head and clutched the cord.

Hazard & Heroism

Being Stories Told by

G. A. HENTY

LOUIS TRACY

HAROLD BINDLOSS

EDWIN LESTER ARNOLD

Lt.-Col. A. F. MOCKLER-FERRYMAN

&c., &c.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

W. H. C. GROOME, R.B.A.

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THE WRECK ON THE GOODWINS.

A DEAL BOATMAN'S YARN.

BY G. A. HENTY.



I WAS staying in Deal during the great storm of December 186—. December is not a month that one would choose for staying at Deal; but I had been engaged in a very arduous case at Westminster, and at its conclusion I was so fagged that my doctor ordered me a fortnight's absolute rest, to be spent at the seaside. I don't know why I chose Deal, for Deal is the dullest and dreariest seaside town in the kingdom; but somehow it was the first place that occurred to me, and I thought that I might as well go there as anywhere else.

The only possible thing to do at Deal is to talk to the boatmen; and as the boatmen also appear, for the most part, to have nothing to do, they are ready enough to enter into conversation with any visitor who, from his appearance, is likely to have the price of a pot of beer in his pocket. As I was never without a sufficiency of coin for the purpose, I had soon plenty of acquaintances on the beach. My chief

gossip, however, was Ned Cavell, a weather-beaten fisherman of some fifty years of age. With him I was talking on the evening before the great storm. It was blowing then what appeared to me to be a hurricane, and I crouched for shelter behind a low wall as I shouted an occasional sentence to Ned. A tremendous sea was breaking on the shore, and the dull crash of each wave as it broke, and the long rattle of the shingle between times, made almost as much uproar as did the tempest itself.

‘Do you think the wind will go down before morning?’ I shouted.

‘Go down? Not it; it’s blowing great guns now, but it will blow harder before it’s done. It’s working round more to the east of south, and they’ll want all their anchors over there in the Downs. If you look out of your window to-night, like enough you will see the flashes of guns out by the Goodwins. Good-night, sir; you’d best get back and into shelter; here comes the rain again.’

I soon followed his advice, for the drops came with the force of hailstones, and literally stung my face. I was glad when I was back at my hotel, and the bright fire blazing in the grate and the cheerful light of the gas were very welcome after the darkness and struggle outside. The wind, however, was scarcely less strong than before, for the hotel stood upon the very beach, and it seemed to quiver and rock under the force of the gusts of wind, while I could distinctly feel a tremor as each wave crashed down on the shingle outside. I had, facing the sea, a window and a glass door opening on to a veranda which ran along outside, and several times I thought that they

would come in with the fury of the gale. For a time I sat and smoked by the fire ; but the din was too tremendous for the enjoyment of my cigar, and ere long I came to the conclusion that upon a night like this, of all others, bed was the most comfortable place. It was a long time before I went to sleep, and when I did so I slept but badly. Over and over again I got up and strained my eyes into the darkness trying to see the flash of guns on the Goodwins ; but the rain beat against the window, and I could see nothing whatever. Towards morning, however, I heard, between the gusts of wind, shouts on the beach outside, and going to the window again, saw that for the moment the rain had stopped, and that a faint—a very faint—light was breaking in the east. There was a good deal of shouting on the beach, and as I found, when I looked at my watch, that it was past seven, I determined to dress and go out to see what was the matter.

By the time I was ready to start the twilight was already gray, and objects at a short distance were visible distinctly enough. The door of the hotel opened into the street, and for once I went out this way, instead of going as usual from my sitting-room direct through the veranda down on to the beach ; for I doubted whether I should ever be able to close the French window if I once opened it. When I first issued out I was sheltered by the house itself from the fury of the gale ; but the instant I rounded the corner the wind had me in its grasp, threw me across the road against the houses there, and I was so bruised and hurt that I had to wait some little time in shelter before I went out into the struggle

again. This time I was prepared, and gradually and with great difficulty I made my way down to the beach and joined a group of sailors standing there. My friend Ned was among them. He put his face close to mine, and then, using his hand as a covered way between his mouth and my ear, he shouted :

‘I was about right, you see. This is a bad night’s work.’

‘Any wrecks?’ I shouted back.

He pointed first to the beach, which was strewn with fragments of planks, and then in four directions out at sea. I started back with horror. There, apparently close at hand, although perhaps nearly a quarter of a mile off, were four vessels, with the sea making a clean breach over them. One was already fast going to pieces; her masts and bulwarks were gone, and the hull was breaking up. Another was in rather better plight, for her bulwarks still remained; but she was so completely covered by the waves that it was evident she could not hold together long. The others were larger vessels, and were lying farther from shore. Their masts were still standing; but even while I looked the foremast of one fell with a crash.

‘Can nothing be done?’ I asked.

‘We’ve tried three times to launch the lifeboat, but the wind’s dead on shore, and no human being can row a boat in its eye in such a gale as this. One chap’s got his arm broke. They’ve taken the boat on its carriage round beyond Walmer. There is a bend in the shore there, and if they can once get afloat they may make a slant across to them

barques. As to the brigs inshore, it is all up with them.'

'Can't a rocket be thrown over them?'

'It's too far against the wind. Tide's only half-high yet; you see it is not far up the beach. As it rises they'll beat nearer inshore, and then we might drop a rocket over them; but there's no one alive on board. I doubt if they'll hold together another quarter of an hour. Wood and iron can't stand such blows as these. There go the other masts out of one of them. There's the lifeboat—there; do you see it, sir?'

I saw it for a moment, and then lost sight of it; then it came up on the top of the wave again, a black mass with a rag of sail.

'Will she make the barque?'

'Ay, ay, she'll make it safe enough; but I hardly thought they'd have dared show any sail. It's the only way, though, for the wind would have blown them to leeward if they'd trusted to their oars.'

Small as was the sail, however, they had several times to lower it during the gusts, and at last they took it in altogether. They had already been rowing with some of the oars, and the rest were now got out and the struggle began in earnest. They were making for the ship which was farthest out. It was a long and desperate fight, for they missed her in their first attempt, and were now struggling due head to wind. They seemed so close to her that I wondered those on board did not heave a rope to them. But distances are deceptive; and it was not until after half-an-hour's rowing, during which the boat appeared to stand still, that an exclamation of

pleasure from the keen-eyed boatmen around told me that they had got sufficiently near for a rope to be thrown.

Five minutes later she left the barque and made for the ship next to her. This was comparatively easy work; and after a short stay near her the lifeboat made straight for shore, for it was plain at a glance that there could be no living soul on board the brig near shore. Now the boatmen ran down with ropes to meet the lifeboat, wading waist-deep into the water; and soon, amid a hearty cheer from hundreds who were now gathered on the beach, she ran in on a mighty wave, and before the next came fifty brawny arms hauled her out of reach of the sea. Three-and-twenty souls had been saved.

The storm lasted, with scarce an abatement of its fury, for three days. On the fourth the wind went down suddenly, the sky cleared, and the sun shone out. The sea rapidly grew calmer, for the wind had backed round to the west of south, and the South Foreland sheltered us somewhat. The boatmen were soon afloat in search of wreckage, and some kept along the edge of the sea and secured the timber that came ashore. Already large piles had been made of the fragments which had drifted in during the storm. A few of the ribs and the stern and stern-posts alone remained in position where the barques had struck, while of the brig inshore no vestige remained above water. Late in the afternoon I met Ned Cavell.

‘This is a change, Ned, from the scene three mornings ago.’

‘Ay, it is, sir. I’ve been out since daylight, but

there ain't much to be found; what has not come ashore has drifted down Channel.'

'I see by the papers that there were three ships lost on the Goodwins.'

'So I hear,' Ned said. 'We saw some lights burnt there, but there was no getting out from here in the teeth of that gale. The Ramsgate and Broadstairs boats both went out. The wind was better for them; besides, they've got a tug there.'

'Yes,' I said; 'I suppose it was impossible to beat out from here in the teeth of the wind.'

Ned turned the quid of tobacco in his mouth.

'Well, sir, it would look impossible, but the thing was done in very nigh as heavy a storm as this last, and just in the same quarter. But that was a rum affair altogether, that was, and we sha'n't never see that done again.'

'How is that, Ned? If it was done once, I suppose it might be done again.'

'Not it!' the man said decisively. 'It was never done before, and it won't never be done again.'

'Well, tell me how it was, Ned, and what there was rum about it, as you say.'

The boatman was silent for some time, and then said:

'Well, sir, it's a story we none of us care much for telling. Some people wouldn't believe it; and when you know that a thing's Bible truth you don't like having it doubted. It made a lot of talk on the beach at the time, but it never got generally known, for the reason I have given you. There was twelve of us on board, and we weren't the sort of chaps to tell lies or to get

confused as to what we saw; and none of our mates ever doubted that it was as we said; but you shore-going people, who thinks you know all about everything, and doubts everything you cannot feel and handle, it wasn't likely we were going to get laughed at by telling you. But it's true as gospel for all that.'

'Well, Ned, you can tell me the story; I am not likely to laugh at you, and I do believe in things I can't touch or handle.'

Ned was again silent for a bit, and then made up his mind.

'Well, sir, it's fifteen year back now, and I haven't opened my mouth on it since the time it happened, save sometimes over a pipe with the mates who were on board with me. There ain't many of us left. Bill Garrett, he's a pilot now; and Joe Chinnery, he's coxswain to the lifeboat here; and Jack Dowse, he's on the shore still—there, that's him with the south-wester down there by the water; and me. That's all I know on; maybe there's one or two others alive and knocking about, but they've left the beach years ago, and I ain't heard on 'em. Well, sir, the thing happened just this way. We'd had a very wild day, and as the sun went down the wind got up, till it was just blowing as you saw it blow three days back. Dick Pearson—he was the coxswain then—had been over at Dover, but walked across before nightfall, thinking he might be wanted. We were, most of us, gathered at the "Anchor"—that was generally our house of meeting in those days when we expected work to be done—when Dick came in dripping wet, as if he'd

been in the sea, and called for a glass of hot grog, and drank it off before he said a word.

“I thought I should never get across the Downs in the face of this wind and rain,” he said, “and had half a mind to go back, for I don’t see as we could get her out in the face of this wind nohow. As it blows now it’s a Ramsgate job if it’s needed.”

“That’s so,” said Bill Garrett. “Any news at Dover?”

“Shocking bad smash to a train this afternoon, just as it came out of the tunnel. Two or three killed right out, and a lot more hurt.”

“That’s bad,” we all says. “Any one from this part?”

“Two of them belong to Dover; but one of the men killed, I heard tell, is a young lieutenant in the royal navy—Gibbons by name.”

‘Well, sir, we soon broke up, for although we did not look to go out, no one can say what might happen in a night like that; and if anything came ashore we were bound to make a try of it. I came down once or twice in the night to the look-out, and heard that there had been some rockets up from the Goodwins; but as Bill had said, with the wind dead in our teeth, that was a Broadstairs or Ramsgate job.

‘It was just daylight when a knock came at my door, and a message as I were wanted on the beach. Down I went, looking out seaward as I went, expecting to see a ship ashore; but there was nothing as far as I could see. The chaps were gathering round the lifeboat-house.

“What’s up?” says I.

“A chap has just come round on horseback from Ramsgate to say the lifeboat there has got stove in against the pier at starting. Broadstairs has gone out; but there are two ships on the Goodwins, both large vessels.”

“It ain’t possible to pull off in the teeth of this gale,” Joe Chinnery said; and we all agreed with him.

‘Just at that moment down came Bill Pearson; and walking close behind him was a young fellow in the dress of a naval officer.

‘Bill somehow looked excited-like. “Well, lads,” said he, “you’ve heard the news. I suppose you’re goin’ to make a try?”

“We’re game enough,” says we; “but you know, Bill, it ain’t possible.”

“No,” he says in a hesitating sort of way; “I know as it ain’t possible. And yet, boys, somehow I feels a call to do it. I don’t know how it is, but I feels bound to go out to that ’ere vessel.”

‘Well, we looked at each other rather surprised-like, for this weren’t like Bill, who was a good sailor—never better—but rather slow in his ways and not easy put out of his regular course. There was a pause, and the young officer stepped up behind him and seemed to speak in his ear.

“Come, mates,” Bill said; “like enough there’s wives and children on board that ship. Let’s make a trial, anyhow. If we can’t do it we can’t, but we might try. Come, down with her, lads; it’s a brave work.”

‘And Bill put his shoulder to the boat. The young officer did the same, and we all joined in, and

the boat began to move down the ways. I can't say why we did it, for there was not one of us but looked upon it as folly; but Bill's talk and way, so unlike himself, seemed to carry me along; and when we talked it over afterwards I found each man felt the same.

'The tide was near high, and we stopped her just short of the water; then we went up to the house and put on our regular lifeboat suits, with the south-westerns and life-belts. No one made any further talk about it, for it seemed a settled thing, though really none of us had actually agreed. There were plenty of hands down on the beach, and one or two chaps spoke up and said it was madness trying to pull against that sea; but Bill Pearson shut them up sharp and told them to mind their own business. So we took our places, and just as the last shove was being given, the young officer stepped on board and sat down next to Bill at the rudder. Bill didn't say nothing, so we supposed they'd arranged it between them before they came down to the beach; and in another minute she was afloat, and every man was rowing all he knew to force her over the big waves. The young chap sat one side of the boat and Bill on the other; so the rudder was atween them, and the young officer put his hand on it as if to help Bill steer.

'What a time we had of it! The sea was tremendous, and it looked as if each wave must swamp her and wash us out of our seats; but Bill always just gives her the helm a little at the right moment, and up she went as easy as a bird. He was always a good coxswain, but I never saw him or any one

else steer a boat as fine as that. Sometimes when the gusts came on, and the boat seemed to go back in spite of all we could do, the young officer would lean forward and put his hand on my oar—I was pulling the port stroke-oar—and push to help me; and I thought then what strength that chap had in his arm, for the oar seemed to go through the water and the boat to move quicker. Rowing as we did, it took us eight mortal hours afore we gets to the wreck nearest to us.

‘What a row that was! Sometimes a wave would strike her and throw her pretty near upright; then a comber would break into her bows, and we’d seem as much under water as above it. At times the gusts would come with such force that it would be all we could do to keep the oar from being wrenched from our hands. It was awful work, and so slowly did we creep on that half-a-dozen times we were on the point of giving it up as hopeless; but every time a word was said the passenger would lean forward and say something to Bill, and Bill would sing out, “Now, lads, keep a brave heart—keep a brave heart; think of the women and children. Stick to it, mates, for their sakes.” Every time Bill sang out it struck me as strange, even in the hard struggle that we were having. Bill was not a chap to talk, and these speeches were as unlike his way as could be. However, we rowed on.

‘I never rowed so hard in my life, and my mates all said the same; but, as we came to agree, it were the steering that did it, and the help the officer gave to my oar. Every man on board was ready

to swear afterwards that the moment he put his hand to it they could feel her move.

‘There we were at last. She was a fine ship, a China vessel, as we heard afterwards. Her masts were gone, and work we had to get up under her lee. They threw us a rope, and the bow-oar clambered up her side to help the people down. There were some sixteen left, among them a lady with a little child in her arms. She was lashed to a ring under the bulwark, and this had saved her from being washed off by the waves. All the rest of the crew and passengers were gone except these sixteen. The lady, who was almost insensible, was lowered down, and the others got down as they could, and then we were off again for the shore. We were so crowded now we could hardly use our oars. But it did not matter; the wind and waves took her along, and it seemed no time before we were running in on the crest of a roller on to the beach there.

‘It wasn’t till all the people as had been saved had been taken up to the hotel, and we had got the lifeboat up into her shed, that the thought came suddenly upon me that I had not seen our passenger since we reached the wreck.

“‘I say, you chaps,” I said, “did that young officer come back with us in the boat? I never noticed him after we reached the ship.”

“‘Nor I neither,” every one answered.

“‘Could he have been left on the ship, or fallen overboard? Good heavens! how could we have missed him?”

“‘Who are you talking about, Ned?” asked

Bill Pearson, who had been stooping to put the shores under her keel.

“Why, that naval friend of yours.”

“Naval friend!” says Bill, in surprise. “Who do you mean?”

“Mean!” says I; “why, that young officer.”

“What officer?” Bill says, still more surprised. “I don’t know no naval officer.”

‘We all looked at Bill in astonishment. Surely he wasn’t going off his head? He had seemed strange all day. So Joe Chinnery says to him, quiet-like, “Ned means that young lieutenant in the navy who came down with you, helped us launch the boat, and then sat with you and steered all the way out, except when he was lending a hand at Ned’s oar.”

‘Bill looked at Joe almost silly-like, and then he said, “Let’s get into the air.”

‘When we got out he stood with his hands over his face for a minute or two, and then he said in a low voice, “Did all of you chaps see just what Joe says he saw?”

“Ay, ay, Bill; we all saw it, of course. But what has become of him?”

“Well, lads, I don’t know whether you or I’m going mad, but strike me dead if ever I saw any young fellow, such as you say, on the beach or in the boat!”

‘We looked at each other stupid-like. Bill was speaking just as calm as I am now, but he was clearly off his head.

“But he spoke to you, Bill, just before we launched the boat, before you told us to go for the

sake of the women and children ; and again several times in the boat ; and each time you called on us again."

" "I never see him," Bill said solemnly—"I never see him, and never heard him ; but all day"—and he hesitated—"all day I have seemed to be saying things that come to me without knowing why. But where is he ?"

" "That's just what we are asking, Bill. He was there when we came alongside the ship, and I didn't see him afterwards. People came crowding in, and every one shifted where he could, and we were crowded up astern, and I never thought of him till I spoke."

" "But you stroke-oar men never moved," Bill said.

" "No ; people came past us into the stern, but I certainly don't remember that young fellow stepping past us, as he must have done, to get to the ship.—Did you, lads ?"

"None of the men who had remained in the boat had seen him pass out, and now we thought of it, we were certain that he could not have done so without our noticing it.

" "Then he must have fallen overboard."

" "How could he have done that ?" Bill asked. "A fellow doesn't sit in the stern-sheets of a boat and tumble out without saying a word."

" "No ; but he might have squeezed himself right up to make room for that lady and the others ; and he might have sat on the gunwale, and turned suddenly over when she rolled. That is possible."

‘Yes, every one allowed that that was possible, and many a voice was raised in regret that so brave a young fellow should have lost his life.

‘Bill Pearson heard us in silence, and then said :

‘“You may think I’m mad, mates, but I don’t believe there was any such chap ever on board of us.”

‘We shook our heads gravely to each other ; it was clear that poor Bill had got some sort of a stroke, and that he was off his head. We then scattered to our homes to change and eat ; and an hour or so later, as was our custom after a successful voyage, we gathered in the dusk at the “Anchor” for a friendly glass all round. Bill was the last to arrive, and before he came we talked over what was best to be done ; and we agreed we’d best speak to the naval officer at the coastguard station, and ask him what course we ought to steer.

‘The fire was a bright one and was blazing high when Bill came in. He was as white as a drowned corpse, and we looked at him and at each other ; for it was plain he was going off rapid. He didn’t say a word till he gets to the big chair by the fire, which was looked upon as his by rights, and then, without speaking, he held out his hand for a glass. I gave him mine, which had just been poured out hot and strong, and he drank it straight off as if he didn’t know there was anything in it. He reached a pipe from over the mantel, and took a ’baccy-box one of us held out to him ; but his hand shook so he couldn’t fill his pipe.

‘“Some of you chaps were here last night when I came back from Dover,” he said in a very low

voice; but we were so still that we could all hear him.

“Ay, Bill, best part of us was here.”

“Will some one just say what was the tale I brought back?” He spoke without looking up, but as if he was talking in his sleep.

‘As I was sitting next to him, I took it up.

“You said there had been a baddish smash on the line at the mouth of the tunnel—that three people were killed and several hurt.”

‘Dick nodded; then, as I stopped, he nodded again as if he wanted more.

“Two of the people was townspeople; the other was a lieutenant in the navy.”

‘He nodded again.

“What name?”

“Let’s think,” said I, for the name slipped me.

“Gibbons was his name,” says all the others.

“That’s so,” said I; “Gibbons was his name.”

“Gibbons was the name?” Bill says, looking round to us all.

“Ay, ay,” every one who had been there the night before said; “Gibbons was the name sure enough.”

“I’ve been round to the hotel,” Bill went on in the same strange way, “as is my duty as coxswain, to get the names of the parties saved, to enter them in our books. I’ve found the name of the lady with the child. Her name is Gibbons, and her husband’s a lieutenant in the navy.”

‘None of us saw what there was in that to make Bill look so strangely round at us.

“Don’t you see?” he said.

“Ay,” Joe Chinnery said; “it’s a bad job, surely, for her to get saved herself, and then to hear her husband’s killed—leastways, if it is her husband; but maybe there’s more than one Gibbons in the navy.”

“That’s all you make out of it—eh?” Bill said, with a queer sort of smile.

‘None of us answered.

“Do you think,” he said, “that any of you would know that young officer that you said sailed with us to-day?”

“Ay, ay,” said every one in the room.

“Then,” said Bill, standing up and speaking firm and like himself, “you walk over with me to Dover to-morrow and I’ll show him you.”

‘We looked at each other again; it was plain poor Bill was getting more and more crazed.

“You come with me to the inquest of Lieutenant Gibbons of the royal navy, and if you don’t see the chap that came on board to-day my name’s not Bill Pearson. The ship was signalled as she came up Channel; she was coming home from China with the wife and child. As I hear, the husband had to come home in a frigate, and couldn’t bring her with him. When the ship was signalled, no doubt he came down from London to be off and meet her in the Downs. He’s killed. What then, lads?”

‘We saw now what he was driving at, and were looking at each other with faces as pale as his own.

“The last thought in his mind was the storm that was blowing; and he couldn’t rest with the thought of his wife and child in danger; so he stirs me up to take him out on a job I should never have

undertaken. He lends a hand to steer the boat out where I should never have got her through; and when we gets alongside, and he sees as the job he had at heart was finished, he goes off again contented. Isn't that truth and gospel?"

'I won't tell you what we felt, sir, when it came fairly to us that we had been steered by that poor fellow's spirit to save his wife. I doubt if the crew of a lifeboat ever looked so white before. But there it was, and there was no getting over it. We walked across to Dover next morning and got permission to view the body, and there was no doubt in the world that it was the man we had seen in the lifeboat.

'There, sir, that's about all the story, and it's gospel truth. I never heard what became of his widow, or how she learned of his death. Bill Pearson, he resigned his berth as coxswain next day; he said he should never have the pluck to sit on that seat again. We were all badly frightened; but as we didn't see why it should bring bad luck to the boat, we most of us kept to it; and I got Bill's place, and held it for nigh ten years, when I began to get too old for hard work in winter.

'There, now you see why I said that though a boat had gone out once in the teeth of a great gale to the Goodwins from this beach, it would never be done again—leastways until some one comes from the other world to lend a hand to save his widow and child.'

THE THUGS' REVENGE.

BY G. A. HENTY.

IT is more like a war than a hunt for murderers, sir. It is astounding that although every one has been aware that a lot of people were murdered every year by the Thugs, no one has the slightest idea of the enormous number that are put away, as acknowledged by some of the scoundrels Sleeman has caught.'

'I agree with you, Harvey; it is astounding and, I must admit, very humiliating. Here have we been for the last thirty years strong in the belief that throughout the whole of India, where we were masters, life and property were fairly secure; and now we find that thousands of murders—I am not sure that we may not go a great deal further than that—have been committed every year under our very noses, and without our having the slightest conception of what was going on. Of course, we have often heard of people being missing; that might arise from a variety of causes, but it was seldom indeed that any suspicions of murder were hinted at. We know now, of course, that the natives were silent partly from superstitious dread—indeed, it looks like superstitious reverence for the Thugs—partly from a fear of their vengeance if they made any complaint.

‘It was in the beginning of the century that the very existence of these scoundrels was first known to us, but during the thirty years that have passed little has been done to put them down. The whole thing seems surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery, and if it had not been for the number of sepoy who disappeared on their way home on leave, the question would not have attracted much attention. It was a matter of rumour rather than of fact; no serious complaints were made, and yet indirectly we were constantly hearing of disappearances. Sometimes carriers coming up-country with goods sent from the ports to district officers or regiments never arrived; they were heard of up to a certain point, and from there vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

‘If you spoke of the matter to a native trader, or a native of any rank, he would look frightened, would whisper in your ear the word Thug; but nothing would induce him to say more. It is only now that these Acts against Thuggism have been passed by Lord Bentinck, and Sleeman, Borthwick, Stewart, and the others have taken the matter in hand in earnest, that we are beginning to learn the terrific extent to which this thing has been carried on in our midst, and not only in our provinces but all over India. I hear that twenty-four scoundrels who have been admitted as king’s evidence have acknowledged being present at an average of two hundred and six murders each. It passes belief. However, I have had letters saying that some of these scoundrels have mentioned my district as one

of the worst in India, and urging me to take the most stringent steps to discover the bands and to root them out. The question is how to set about it. I have been in charge of the district for the last six years, and could have sworn that I was aware of every crime—I mean crime of violence—that had been perpetrated in it during that time. There is no doubt that a poison is very extensively used for getting rid of inconvenient relations or disagreeable neighbours; but, of course, we have no means whatever of proving that it is so. But I certainly had no idea that there was any Thuggism here, though now that we have become aware of its fearful prevalence, I can recall many cases in which persons have disappeared—that is, of persons who ought to have come but who never arrived. Sometimes it was soldiers, which we have put down to desertion; sometimes it was merchants, and we have supposed that they had changed their minds and taken some other route; sometimes it was carriers, and we imagined that they had bolted with the goods. Here comes the Colonel; we must talk the matter over and see how we had best set about it.'

The station at which this conversation had taken place lay between Benares and Agra. A regiment of native troops was stationed there, and it was the headquarters of the district. Mr Porson, a Company servant of many years' standing, was the chief officer of the district. His bungalow and those of the other civil officials stood close to the parade-ground of the regiment. Next to these were the regimental bungalows, while the men's lines occupied two sides

of the square. Captain Harvey was engaged to Mr Porson's daughter Emily, whose mother had died two years before, and who had taken her place at the head of her father's establishment three months later, she having been at the time of her mother's death on the way out after six years spent at school in England. On the Colonel's arrival, he and Mr Porson sat talking on the veranda for an hour, while Captain Harvey spent the time indoors with Emily.

'I am quite frightened about those horrible Thugs, Charley,' she said. 'There is scarcely anything else talked about. It seems so dreadful that all this time people should have been murdered all along the road without our having the least idea of it. It makes me feel quite nervous.'

'I don't think there is anything to be nervous about,' Captain Harvey said lightly; 'at any rate, nobody has ever been missed from this cantonment during the three years that we have been stationed here. You see, it is the main object of those fellows to attract as little attention on the part of the authorities as possible; though I don't say that I have not heard of officers having disappeared mysteriously on their way up-country. The residents seem to be safe, for of course if they disappeared there would be a hue and cry at once. But certainly we have lost some twenty or thirty men while we have been here, and it has always been a puzzle to us. They went on leave to their native villages, which are for the most part down in Bengal, and never returned. Of course, we had inquiries made of the village headmen; but very few of them had

ever reached their homes. There seemed no reason for their deserting; several of them had a long time of service, and would have got their pension in a few years. We have often talked it over at mess, and since two large gangs of Thugs were arrested some years ago in the valley of the Nerbudda, the prevalence of Thuggism has always been a moot subject, and it was thought that some of them might have been murdered. Of course, there is now very little doubt that most of them fell victims to those villains.'

'But how is it that we have not heard more of them, Charley? One would have thought that complaints would have been constant.'

'The Thugs regard their calling as a sacred one, and as one of high honour. They believe themselves under a goddess named Kalee, who is also called Bhowanee, Devey, and Davey. They make sacrifices to her, and all their preparations for murder are carried out as if they were acts of worship. The curious part of the business is that the Thugs are said to be Mohammedans, which makes this worship of a Hindu divinity all the more extraordinary. The worst of it is, the population at large believe them also to be sacred in the same sort of way that a fakir is, and would no more think of betraying them than they would of flying. They themselves have no fear of them, for the Thugs never interfere with the villagers or local landowners, but prey entirely upon travellers. But now we are going to set to work to root them out.'

'Don't you think that they may try to revenge themselves?'

‘Of course, it is possible that they may do so; but I think that it is very improbable. They will more than ever try to avoid exciting suspicion. At present, beyond the fact that there are Thugs in this district, we have not the slightest ground for suspecting one man more than another. For aught we know, the next village beyond this may be composed entirely of Thugs.’

‘It is horrible to think of,’ the girl said. ‘I shall be afraid to go outside the cantonment.’

‘Well, I do think that it would be just as well at present for you, and indeed for every one, not to ride outside except in strong parties; though, mind, I do not think that there is any real danger; for it would seem that the Thugs never openly attack, but that the murders are only performed at halting-places, where the victims have been lulled into a state of security and are strangled before they can even attempt to defend themselves.’

‘Do you know, Charley, I think I shall have to send the two dogs back to you. They are dear little things, but, do what I can, they will bark so, and it irritates father terribly. Whenever a native messenger, or any one with a complaint to make—or, in fact, any native except the servant—comes into the compound, they rush at him, barking and yelping as if they meant to eat him alive; and they frighten the natives horribly.’

Captain Harvey laughed. ‘Well, I own it is not pleasant when you have no sort of protection for your legs, and not even a heavy boot to give a good kick with, to have a couple of savage terriers going for you. But they don’t bite, do they?’

'No, they don't bite, because the natives stand stock-still and father roars at them, or I run out and scold them.'

'Don't you send them back, Emily; they are good little guards, and they are first-rate little dogs too. Windham brought their father and mother out with him from his place in Scotland, and both are thoroughbred Scotch terriers. It was very good of him to send me a couple of the pups up from Benares. I told him I wanted them for you, because, as your father is so much away, they would be companions for you. If you keep them shut up as much as you can during the day they won't be such an annoyance; and of course when he is away on his tours they can wander about as they like. I had better go out on the veranda and hear what they have decided upon.'

On joining the Colonel and Mr Porson, Captain Harvey found that they had agreed that the first thing to be done was to find the localities where the disappearance of travellers was most frequent.

'Unfortunately we cannot trust the natives,' the Colonel said. 'They are, if not in actual alliance with the Thugs, too much afraid of them to give us any clue. We think of getting Hayes with his police to set about the matter, and we shall attach the three subalterns to his force. We shall watch the road down from here, to begin with, and Hayes will distribute his own native officers and ours among the towns where the travellers halt. Each will have five or six men with him, two or three of whom will be in disguise. It will be their duty to go about to the khans, and mark what travellers arrive and

what leave them every morning. A mounted man will carry to the next station an account of the travellers who have left and who have arrived there that night.

‘If a party come in with some of their number short—especially if those missing appear to be merchants or men of substance—the officer of that station will pounce suddenly upon the rest and thoroughly search them. If property such as merchandise is found upon them, they will be detained while inquiries are made concerning them; and if on any is found the handkerchief with which the deed is always done, or the axes which Thugs always hold to be sacred, they will all be thrown into prison. Then a thorough search will be made in the groves that would probably be used as their midday halting-place, and if any bodies are found buried there it will complete the chain of evidence. Probably, as soon as they are seized, one or other of the gang will turn informers. Sacred as they may hold their calling, they seem ready enough to betray their companions in order to save their own lives. Even their leaders seem ready enough to peach directly they find the game is up. Look at that scoundrel Feringeea, who has taken a hand in many hundreds of murders, and now acts as a sort of bloodhound to Sleeman to save his miserable life. Of course, the parties of police will all give out that they have been detailed to visit the town to inquire about the visits of some dacoits who have been reported as being in that neighbourhood.’

‘I think that is a capital plan,’ Captain Harvey said; ‘and if there are bands really at work in this

district we shall certainly lay hands upon them, either south or north of this station.'

The plan was carried out, and a week later a party of thirty men were arrested. They had left the frontier town half-an-hour after six cloth-merchants, having with them four women and eight servants, had gone on. The latter had not arrived at the next town, but the Thugs had with them several laden horses. As these were not in their possession when they started in the morning, they were arrested and charged with the murder of the merchants' party. Seven or eight hundred pounds worth of silver was found among them, and concealed in their garments were found two pickaxes, three hatchets, and four large handkerchiefs. As soon as they were separated, several had offered to turn informers on the promise of their lives being spared. One of these had led the officer to a grove where the whole of their victims had been buried. It was found that the Thugs belonged to two villages lying a few miles off the main road. Their wives and families were, as was usually the case, in complete ignorance of their being engaged in the ghastly profession, and believed that they were occupied in trade. Their houses were closely searched, the floors and the ground around dug up, and a considerable amount of money and jewels discovered. The news caused great excitement throughout the district. The revelations made by the captured Thugs led to the discovery of a large number of graves in the groves all along the road. The searchers, however, brought to light a considerable number of burying-places that the Thugs were unanimous in declaring they knew nothing of. These

were therefore considered to prove conclusively that there were other gangs at work in the district.

Mr Porson had been most active in these investigations, and, with an escort of six sepoys, had gone up and down the road, and had been present at the searches made among the groves. Emily one day received a note from him saying that he should be back on the following afternoon, and asking her to invite the Colonel and several of the residents to dinner that evening. The hour came and the guests assembled, but Mr Porson had not returned. Emily looked rather anxious, but the Colonel reassured her by saying that no doubt her father had received some information that had caused him to start off anew, and that doubtless they would hear from him before dinner was over. The meal passed off as usual; that an officer engaged on duty should be detained unexpectedly was so common an event that no one thought anything of it. At eleven o'clock they separated.

'I would not have said so on any account before Miss Porson,' the Colonel said to Captain Harvey as they walked back, 'but I do wonder that no message has arrived from Porson. After having asked us to dinner, he would have known that his absence must seem a little curious, and I should have thought that he would have sent a message with a *chit* explaining how he was detained. You see, he has been taking a very prominent part in this Thug business, and is no doubt cordially hated by the scoundrels; and though it is altogether out of their line to attack any one by open force, I own that I shall feel anxious until we get some specific news of him.'

'I feel quite the same about it,' Captain Harvey agreed. 'There is no doubt the scoundrels are leagued in a common bond of vengeance against all whom they consider to be enemies of their sect; for a sect it is, though the various gangs do not seem to have much communication with each other; but they often unite if they meet, and work for a time together. I think I will go across to the police lines and tell the native officer in charge to send off a sowar at once to Bilkote, where Porson was yesterday, to make inquiries as to where he has gone.'

'Do so, Harvey. You can say that you act upon my orders. Order the man to ride back again with any news he may get without an hour's delay.'

Having seen the mounted policeman start, Captain Harvey returned to his bungalow. He felt increasingly uneasy as he thought the matter over, and at last said to himself, 'I will walk up to Porson's bungalow. A messenger may have arrived since we left. Anyhow, some of the servants are sure to be asleep in the veranda.'

Mechanically he hooked his sword on to his belt, and lighting a fresh cigar, strolled up the road. He was within fifty yards of the bungalow, when the stillness was broken by the wild barking of dogs, followed by a shriek. He rushed forward at full speed, drawing his sword as he sprang into the compound, jumped on to the veranda, and dashing aside the white curtain that hung across the French window opening from Emily's room on to it, burst in.

The girl was sitting up in bed screaming, while the two dogs were furiously attacking three natives, two of whom, armed with daggers, were striking



One of them he ran through, while the two dogs pinned the other.

at them, while another, with a handkerchief in his hand, was on the point of throwing it around Emily's neck. In a moment Captain Harvey sprang forward and cut the man down, and then turned upon the others. One of them he ran through, while the two dogs pinned the other, who dropped his dagger and screamed for mercy. By this time the frightened servants had rushed up. Captain Harvey called in the terrified women, and gave the girl, who had fallen back insensible, into their charge.

'Carry out those bodies and the other scoundrel,' he said to the men. But he had difficulty in calling off the dogs, who were worrying the surviving native. 'Keep a sharp watch over him; though I don't think that he is in much of a condition for running, and certainly he will not dare move while the dogs are watching him. One of you run down to the Colonel's quarters, tell his servants that you have my orders that they are to wake him immediately if he is asleep, and beg him to come here at once.'

Then he turned to look at the two men who had fallen. The one with the handkerchief had a severe bite on the wrist, which must have almost, if not quite, disabled the hand. The other was equally badly bitten in both legs. The dogs stood by, growling angrily, with the hair bristling on their backs, and evidently ready to fly again upon their enemies.

'Good little doggies,' Captain Harvey said; 'you have saved your mistress's life.'

It was evident that the Thugs had entered the room so noiselessly that the dogs had not been

aroused. They had probably been sleeping at the foot of their mistress's bed, and as the man with the *roomal* had leant over her and was about to rouse her sufficiently to pass it round her neck, they had sprung up. One had seized him by the wrist, while the other had pinned one of his fellows, and then both had attacked the three Thugs with such fury that they had been unable to carry out their purpose.

As soon as the Colonel came up an examination of the prisoner was held. At first he refused to say anything unless he received a promise that his life should be spared.

'I will give you no promise of anything of the sort. You will have a fair trial. I can say no more than that; but I tell you that if you do not make a clean breast of it and confess everything I will let these two dogs at you again.'

Two of the servants were, by Captain Harvey's orders, holding the dogs by their collars, while the animals were straining and panting, eager to be at their foe again. The terrified Thug at once gave in, and the dogs were taken out of the room. The Thug then stated that, by the orders of the leaders of the band, the man with the *roomal*, his companion, and himself had been sent to strangle Miss Porson in revenge for the injuries her father had inflicted upon the goddess. He and his companion were to take no active part in the deed, but simply accompanied the strangler in order to defend him should, by any ill-chance, an alarm be given. They had noticed the dogs, and had hesitated whether to stab them, but feared that the blows might not be instantly fatal, and had trusted to their companion

doing his work so noiselessly that the animals would not be aroused.

'Now about Mr Porson,' the Colonel said sternly. 'What do you know about him?'

The Thug, having once made up his mind to confess, had no hesitation in making further revelations, especially as he saw that he could make no bargains.

'I will tell you all about his death,' he said, 'and will aid you to capture the others, if you will guarantee that my life shall be spared.'

An exclamation of horror had broken forth from both of his listeners as he said that Mr Porson was dead.

'This is terrible, Harvey,' the Colonel said. 'Who would have dreamt that such a thing could have happened?'

'It is terrible, Colonel; but I have certainly been feeling extremely uneasy at not hearing from him, though I tried to persuade myself that there could be no ground for fear. He had four sowars with him, and knowing the ways of these Thugs and the special necessity for caution in his case, he would never have joined any body of travellers, or have camped in a grove where any other party had established itself.'

'Do you think that I shall be justified in promising this fellow his life, Harvey?'

'I should think so, certainly, Colonel. Every moment is of consequence, and unless we get the whole thing from him and learn what their movements are likely to be, they may slip through our fingers.'

'I think so too,' the Colonel said. Then turning

to the Thug, he said in the man's language, 'I promise you your life if you will not only tell me how Mr Porson was killed, but enable us to capture the gang who did it.'

Assured of his life, the Thug now spoke readily.

'It happened like this. Our leader, knowing that the sahib travelled with four sepoy, ordered ten of the party to proceed together up the road, giving out that they were sepoy going home on leave. One of our party had served for some time in your army. Our leaders had papers found upon sepoy who had been killed, and each of the party had one of these given him, and learned the name and regiment mentioned in it, so as to answer any questions. The man who was to go as their leader taught them how to make the correct salute, to stand at attention, and other signs. He drilled them for two or three hours, and then went up the road, the rest of us following an hour later. They knew where the sahib stopped the night before, and guessed where he would halt for an hour or two during the heat of the day. They found him where they had expected. On seeing the party come along, the sahib and the four sepoy got up and came to the end of the road. They all saluted.

"Who are you?" he asked.

'Their leader said they were sepoy going home on leave to their villages; they belonged to different regiments, but journeyed together as a protection from Thugs.

'The sahib shouted "Attention!" and they all stood erect, with their hands to their sabres. "Form in line!" he said. "Now form fours! March!" Then he was satisfied.

“Are you going to rest here?” he asked.

“We were going to do so, sahib; but as your Excellency is here, we will go on until we have found some other spot.”

“You can stay here,” he said; “there is room for all.”

‘The sepoy were cooking a meal, and one of our party lit a fire near and also began to prepare food. While this was being done the others strolled about. Some moved up near the sepoy, and three went quietly over towards the sahib, who was sitting with his back against a tree. When all was ready the signal was given. The sahib sprang to his feet, but it was too late; the *roomal* was round his neck. Two of the sepoy were strangled; the others leaped to their feet, but were despatched with daggers before they had time to draw their swords. Then one of the party went into the road and waved a white cloth, and we who had been hiding a short distance away went up. The bodies were buried. The four sepoy’s horses, having the Company’s brand, were also killed and buried; but as the sahib’s horse was not branded, it was kept. Then, as I told your lordship, we three were sent off to sacrifice the sahib’s daughter to the goddess. We arrived here about seven o’clock, but had to wait until all was quiet and the sahib’s men were asleep.’

The Thug then gave particulars of the villages from which the Thugs had come, but said that they had gone on up-country as soon as they had cleared away all signs of the struggle. They had told him where they intended to pass the night, and where he and his two companions were to rejoin them in the

morning. A quarter of an hour later the Colonel and Captain Harvey, with a party of twenty mounted police, started, taking the Thug with them as a guide, and riding hard, reached the place where the Thugs had encamped an hour before daylight, and captured the whole party. Mr Porson's horse was evidence of the truth of the Thug's story, and after the capture was effected they rode to the grove where the unfortunate gentleman had been murdered, exhumed the body, and carried it back to the cantonments.

Emily Porson was completely prostrated on hearing of the death of her father, and as soon as the funeral was over, left for Calcutta, where she stayed with some friends for four months. Then Captain Harvey went down and married her, and afterwards had the satisfaction of receiving an appointment on the staff engaged in the special service of rooting out Thuggism.

A FISHWIFE'S DREAM.

A REMINISCENCE OF FALMOUTH.

BY G. A. HENTY.

 FALMOUTH is not a fashionable watering-place. Capitalists and speculative builders have somehow left it alone, and except for its great hotel, standing in a position, as far as I know, unrivalled, there have been comparatively few additions to it in the last quarter of a century. Were I a yachtsman I should make Falmouth my headquarters: blow high, blow low, there are shelter and plenty of sailing-room, while in fine weather there is a glorious coast along which to cruise—something very different from the flat shores from Southampton to Brighton. It is some six years since I was lying in the harbour, having sailed round in a friend's yacht from Cowes. Upon the day after we had come in my friend went on to Truro, and I landed, strolled up, and sat down on a bench high on the seaward face of the hill that shelters the inner harbour.

An old coastguardsman came along. I offered him tobacco, and in five minutes we were in full talk.

‘I suppose those are the pilchard-boats far out there?’

'Ay, that's the pilchard fleet.'

'Do they do well generally?'

'Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't; it's an uncertain fish the pilchard, and it's a rough life is fishing on this coast. There ain't a good harbour not this side of the Lizard; and if they're caught in a gale from the south-east it goes hard with them. With a south-wester they can run back here.'

'Were you ever a fisherman yourself?'

'Ay; I began life at it. I went a-fishing as a boy well-nigh fifty year back, but I got a sickener of it, and tramped to Plymouth and shipped in a frigate there, and served all my time in Queen's ships.'

'Did you get sick of fishing because of the hardships of the life, or from any particular circumstance?'

'I got wrecked on the Scillys. There were fifty boats lost that night, and scarce a hand was saved. I shouldn't have been saved myself if it had not been for a dream of mother's.'

'That's curious,' I said. 'Would you mind telling me about it?'

The old sailor did not speak for a minute or two; and then, after a sharp puff at his pipe, he told me the following story, of which I have but slightly altered the wording:

'I lived with mother at Tregannock. It's a bit of a village now, as it was then. My father had been washed overboard and drowned two years before. I was his only son. The boat I sailed in was mother's, and four men and myself worked her in shares. I was twenty-one or maybe twenty-two years old then. It was one day early in October.

We had had a bad season and times were hard. We 'd agreed to start at eight o'clock in the morning. I was up at five, and went down to the boats to see as everything was ready. When I got back mother had made breakfast; and when we sat down I saw that the old woman had been crying and looked altogether queer-like.

"My boy," says she, "I want you not to go out this trip."

"Not go out!" said I. "Not go out, mother! Why? What's happened? Your share and mine didn't come to three pounds last month, and it would be a talk if I didn't go out in the *Jane*. Why, what is it?"

"My boy," says she, "I've had a dream as how you were drowned."

"Drowned!" said I. "I'm not going to be drowned, mother."

"But what she said made me feel creepy-like, for us Cornishmen goes a good deal on dreams and tokens; and sure enough mother had dreamt father was going to be drowned before he started on that last trip of his.

"That's not all, Will," she said. "I dreamt of you in bed, and a chap was leaning over you cutting your throat."

"I didn't care much for going on with my breakfast after that; but in a minute or two I plucks up and says:

"Well, mother, you're wrong anyhow; for if I be drowned no one has any call to cut my throat."

"I didn't see you downright drowned in my dream," she said. "You were in the sea—a terribly

rough sea—at night, and the waves were breaking down on you.”

“I can’t help going, mother,” I says after a bit. “It’s a fine day, and it’s our boat. All the lads and girls in the village would laugh at me if I stayed at home.”

“That’s just what your father said; and he went to his death.”

‘And my mother, as she says this, puts her apron over her head and began to cry again. I’d more than half a mind to give way; but you know what young chaps are. The thought of what the girls of the place would say about my being afraid to go was too much for me.

‘At last, when mother saw I was bent on going, she got up and said:

“Well, Will, if my prayers can’t keep you back, will you do something else I ask you?”

“I will, mother,” said I—“anything but stay back.”

‘She went off without a word into her bedroom, and she came back with something in her arms.

“Look here, Will; I made this for your father, and he wouldn’t have it; now I ask you to take it, and put it on if a storm comes. You see, you can put it on under your dreadnaught coat, and no one will be any the wiser.”

‘The thing she brought in was two flat Dutch spirit-bottles sewn between two pieces of canvas. It had got strings sewed on for tying round the body, and put on—as she put it to show me how—one bottle each side of the chest, it lay pretty flat.

“Now, Will, these bottles will keep you up for

hours. A gentleman who was staying in the village before you were born was talking about wrecks, and he said that a couple of empty bottles, well corked, would keep up a fair swimmer for hours. So I made it; but no words could get your father to try it, though he was willing enough to say that it would probably keep him afloat. You'll try it, won't you, Will?"

'I didn't much like taking it, but I thought there wasn't much chance of a storm, and that if I put it under my coat and hid it away down in the fore-castle no one would see it; and so to please her I said I'd take it, and that if a bad storm arose I would slip it on.

"I will put a wine-glass of brandy into one of the bottles," mother said. "It may be useful to you; who can say?"

'I got the life-preserver, as you call it nowadays, on board without its being seen, and stowed it away in my locker. I felt glad now I'd got it, for mother's dream had made me feel uneasy; and on my way down old Dick Tremaine said to me:

"I don't like the look of the sky, lad."

"No?" says I. "Why, it looks fine enough."

"Too fine, lad. I tell ye, boy, I don't like the look of it. I think we're going to have a bad blow."

'I told the others what he had said; but they didn't heed much. Two boats had come in that morning with a fine catch, and seeing the bad time we'd been having, it would have taken a lot to keep them in after that.

'We thought no more about it after we had once started. The wind was light and puffy, but we had

great luck, and were too busy to watch the weather. What wind there was was northerly; but towards sunset it dropped suddenly, and as the sails flapped we looked round at the sky.

"I fear old Dick was right, lads," Jabez Harper, who was skipper, said; "and I wish we had taken more heed to his words. That's about as wild a sunset as may be. And look how that drift is nearing our boat."

'Even I, who was the youngest of them, was old enough to read the signs of a storm—the heavy bank of dark clouds, the pale-yellow broken light, the horse-tails high up in the sky, and the small, broken, irregular masses of cloud that hurried across them. Instinctively we looked round towards the coast. It was fully fifteen miles away, and we were to the east of it. The great change in the appearance of the sky had taken place in the last half-hour; previous to that time there had been nothing which would have struck any but a man grown old upon the coast like Dick Tremaine.

"Reef the mainsail," Jabez said; "and the fore-sail too. Take in the mizzen. Like enough it will come with a squall, and we'd best be as snug as may be. What do you say? Shall we throw over some of the fish?"

'It was a hard thing to agree to; but every minute the sky was changing. The scud was flying thicker and faster overhead, and the land was lost in a black cloud that seemed to touch the water.

"We needn't throw 'em all out," Jabez said; "if we get rid of half she'll be about in her best trim;

and she's as good a sea-boat as there is on the coast. Come, lads, don't look at it."

'It was, as he said, no use looking at it, and in five minutes half our catch of the day was overboard. The *Jane* was a half-decked boat, yawl-rigged; she wasn't built in our parts, but had been brought round from somewhere east by a gentleman as a fishing-craft. He had used her for two years, and had got tired of the sport, and my father had bought her of him. She wasn't the sort of boat generally used about here, but we all liked her, and swore by her.

"It will be a tremendous blow for the first few minutes, I reckon," Jabez said after a while. "Lower down her sails altogether; get her head to it with a sweep. I'll take the helm; Harry, you stand ready to hoist the foresail a few feet; and, Will, you and John stand by the hoists of the mainsail. We must show enough to keep her lying-to as long as we can. You'd best get your coats out and put 'em on, and batten down the hatch."

'I let the others go down first, and when they came up I went in, tied the life-belt round me, and put on my oilskin. I fetched out a bottle of hollands from my locker, and then came out and fastened the hatch.

"Here comes the first puff," Jabez said.

'I stowed away the bottle among some ropes for our future use, and took hold of the throat halyards.

"Here it comes," Jabez said, as a white line appeared under the cloud of mist and darkness ahead, and then with a roar it was upon us.

'I have been at sea, man and boy, for forty years,

and I never remember in these latitudes such a squall as that. For a few minutes I could scarcely see or breathe. The spray flew in sheets over us, and the wind roared so that you wouldn't have heard a sixty-eight-pounder ten yards off. At first I thought we were going down bodily. It was lucky we had taken every stitch of canvas off her, for as she spun round, the force of the wind against the masts and rigging all but capsized her. In five minutes the first burst was over, and we were running before it under our close-reefed foresail only. There was no occasion for us to stand by the halyards now, and we all gathered in the stern and crouched down in the well. Although the sun had only gone down half-an-hour it was pitch-dark, except that the white foam round us gave a sort of dim light that made the sky look all the blacker. The sea got up in less time than it takes in telling, and we were soon obliged to hoist the foresail a bit higher to prevent the waves from coming in over the stern. For three hours we tore on before the gale, and then it lulled almost as suddenly as it had come on. There had scarcely been a word spoken between us during this time. I was half-asleep in spite of the showers of spray. Jim Hackers, who was always smoking, puffed away steadily. Jabez was steering still, and the others were quite quiet. With the sudden lull we were all on our feet.

"Is it all over, Jabez?" I asked.

"It's only begun," he said. "I scarce remember such a gale as this since I was a boy. Pass that bottle of yours round, Will; we shall be busy again directly. One of you take the helm; I'm stiff with

the wet. We shall have it round from the south in a few minutes."

"There was scarce a breath of wind now, and she rolled so I thought she would have turned turtle.

"Get out a sweep," Jabez said, "and bring her head round."

"We had scarcely done so ere the first squall from behind struck us, and in five minutes we were running back as fast as we had come. The wind was at first south, but settled round to south-east. We got up a little more sail now, and made a shift to keep her to the west, for with this wind we should have been ashore long before morning if we had run straight before it. The sea had been heavy—it was tremendous now; and, light and seaworthy as the *Jane* was, we had to keep baling as the sea broke into her. Over and over again I thought that it was all over with us as the great waves towered above our stern, but they slipped under us as we went driving on at twelve or fourteen knots an hour. I stood up by the side of Jabez, and asked him what he thought of it.

"I can't keep her off the wind," he said; "we must run, and by midnight we shall be among the Scillys. Then it's a toss-up."

"Jabez's calculations could not have been far out, for it was just midnight, as far as I could tell, when we saw a flash right ahead.

"That's a ship on one of the Scillys," Jabez said. "I wish I knew which it was."

"He tried to bring her a little more up into the wind, but she nearly lay over on to her beam-ends, and Jabez let her go ahead again. We saw one more

flash, and then a broad, faint light. The ship was burning a blue light. She was not a mile ahead now, and we could see she was a large vessel. I had often been to the Scillys before, and knew them as well as I did our coast, but I could not see the land. It was as Jabez had said—a toss-up. If we just missed one of them, we might manage to bring up under its lee; but if we ran dead into one or other of them, the *Jane* would break up like an egg-shell.

‘We were rapidly running down upon the wreck, when the glare of a fire on shore shone up. It was a great blaze, and we could faintly see the land and a white cottage some hundred yards from the shore.

“‘I know it,” Jabez shouted: “we are close to the end of the island. We may miss it yet. Hoist the mainsail a bit.”

‘I leapt up with another to seize the halyards, when a great wave struck us; she gave a roll, and the next moment I was in the water.

‘After the first wild efforts I felt calm-like. I knew the shore was but half a mile ahead, and that the wind would set me dead upon it. I loosened my tarpaulin coat and shook it off, and I found that with mother’s belt I could keep easily enough afloat, though I was half-drowned with the waves as they swept in from behind me. My mother’s dream cheered me up, for, according to that, it did not seem as I was to be drowned, whatever was to come afterwards. I drifted past the wreck within a hundred yards or so. They were still burning blue lights; but the sea made a clean sweep over her, and I saw that in a very few minutes she would go to

pieces. Many times as the seas broke over me I quite gave up hope of reaching shore; but I was a fair swimmer, and the bottles buoyed me up, so I struggled on.

‘I could see the fire on shore, but the surf that broke against the rocks showed a certain death if I made for it, and I tried hard to work to the left, where I could see no breaking surf. It seemed to me that the fire was built close to the end of the island. As I came close I found that this was so. I drifted past the point of land not fifty feet off, where the waves were sending their spray a hundred feet up; then I made a great struggle and got in under the lee of the point. There was a little bay with a shelving shore, and here I made a shift to land. Five minutes to rest, and then I made my way towards the fire. There was no one there, and I went to the edge of the rocks. Here four or five men with ropes were standing, trying to secure some of the casks, chests, and wreckage from the ship. The surf was full of floating objects, but nothing could stand the shock of a crash against those rocks. The water was deep alongside, and the waves as they struck flew up in spray, which made standing almost impossible.

‘The men came round me when they saw me. There was no hearing one speak in the noise of the storm; so I made signs that I had landed behind the point, and that if they came with their ropes to the point they might get something as it floated past. They went off, and I sat down by the fire, wrung my clothes as well as I could—I thought nothing of the wet, for we are wet through half our time in

a fishing-boat—took off mother's belt, and found one of the bottles had broke as I got ashore; but luckily it was the one which was quite empty. I got the cork out of the other, and had a drink of brandy, and then felt pretty right again. I had good hopes the boat was all right, for she would get round the point easily, and Jabez would bring her up under the lee of the island. I thought I would go and see if I could help the others, and perhaps save some one drifting from the wreck; but I did not think there was very much chance, for she lay some little distance to the right, and I hardly thought a swimmer could keep off the shore.

'Just as I was going to move I saw two of the men coming back. They had a body between them, and they put it down a little distance from the fire. I was on the other side, and they had forgotten all about me. They stooped over the figure, and I could not see what they were doing. I got up and went over, and they gave a start when they saw me. "Is he alive?" says I. "Dunno," one of 'em growled; and I could see pretty well that if I had not been there it would have gone hard with the chap. He was a foreign, Jewish-looking fellow, and had around him one of the ship's life-buoys. There were lots of rings on his fingers, and he had a belt round his waist that looked pretty well stuffed out. I put my hand to his heart and found he still breathed; and then I poured a few drops of brandy which remained in my bottle down his throat.

'While I was doing this the two men talked to each other aside. "He's alive, all right," says I. "That's a good job," one of 'em said; but I

knew he didn't think so. "We'll carry him up to our cottage. You'll be all the better for a sleep; it must be past two o'clock by this time."

'They took the chap up, carried him to the cottage, and put him on a bed. He was moaning a little, and between us we undressed him and got him into bed.

"I think he'll come round," I said.

"I don't believe he will. Will you have a drink of whisky?"

'I was mighty glad to do so; and then, throwing off my wet clothes, I got into the other bed—for there were two in the room.

'The men said they were going down again to see what they could get. They left the whisky-bottle on the table, and as soon as I was alone I jumped out and poured a little into the other chap's teeth, so as to give him as good a chance as I could; but I didn't much think he'd get round. And then I got into bed and shut my eyes. I was just going off when, with a sudden jump, I sat straight up. Mother's dream came right across me. I was out of bed in a moment, and looked at the door. There was no bolt, so I put a couple of chairs against it. Then I took my clasp-knife out of my pocket and opened it. I gave the other chap a shake; but there was no sense in him, and I got into bed again. I thought to myself they would never risk a fight when they saw me armed and ready. But I soon found that I couldn't keep awake; so I got up, dressed in my wet clothes, and went to the door. I found it was fastened on the outside. I then opened the window and got out, but before I did

that I rolled up some clothes and put 'em in the bed, and made a sort of likeness of a man there. The poor fellow in bed was lying very still now, and I felt pretty sure that he would not live till morning. The candle was a fresh one when the men had first lighted it, and I left it burning.

'When I had got out I shut the window, and went away fifty yards or so, where I could hear them come back. Presently I heard some footsteps coming from the opposite direction. Then I heard a voice I knew say, "There is the fire; we shall soon know whether the poor lad has got ashore."

"Here am I, Jabez," I said. "Hush!"—as he and the other were going to break into a shout of welcome—"hush! Some wreckers are coming up directly to cut my throat, and that of another chap in that cottage."

'In a word or two I told them all about it, and they agreed to wait with me and see the end of it. Jabez had brought the *Jane* up under the lee of the island, and leaving two of the men on board, had come on shore in the cobbie with the other to look for me, but with very faint hopes of finding me.

"You had best get hold of something to fight with, if you mean to take these fellows, Jabez."

"A good lump of rock is as good a weapon as another," Jabez said.

'Our plan was soon arranged, and half-an-hour later we heard footsteps coming up from the shore again. Two men passed us, went into the cottage, and shut the door. Jabez and I made round to the window, where we could see in, and John Redpath



Jabez stopped, however, and threw the lump of rock.

stood at the door. He was to open it and rush in when he heard us shout. We stood a little back, but we could see well into the room. Presently we saw the door open very quietly, little by little. A hand came through and moved the chairs, and then it opened wide. Then the two men entered. One, a big fellow, had a knife in his hand, and drew towards the bed where, as it seemed, I was sleeping, with my head covered up by the clothes. The other had no knife in his hand, and went towards the other bed.

“Get ready, lad,” Jabez said to me.

‘The big fellow raised his knife and plunged it down into the figure, throwing his weight on to it at the same moment; while the smaller man snatched the pillow from under the other’s head, clapped it over his face, and threw his weight on it. As they did so we pushed the casement open and leapt in. I seized the smaller man, who was suffocating the other chap, and before he could draw his knife I had him on the ground and my knee on his chest. The big fellow had leapt up. He gave a howl of rage as Jabez rushed at him, and stood at bay with his knife. Jabez stopped, however, and threw the lump of rock, as big as a baby’s head, right into his stomach. It just tumbled him over like a cannon-shot. John burst in through the door, and we had ’em both tied tightly before five minutes were over. Then we lit a big fire in the kitchen, and with warm clothes and some hot whisky-and-water, we got the foreign chap pretty well round.

‘In the morning I went off, and found a village on the other side of the island. I woke the people

up and told my story, and to do 'em justice, though there were some who would have shielded the fellows we had caught, the best part were on our side. Some of 'em told me there had been suspicion about these men, and that they bore a bad name. There was no magistrate in the island, and no one objected when I said we would take them across to Penzance and give them in charge there.

'So we did; and they were tried, and got transportation for life for attempting to murder the foreign chap, who, it turned out, was a Brazilian Jew, with diamonds. He offered us all sorts of presents, but we would have none; but that's neither here nor there.

'So you see, master, mother's dream saved me from drowning and from having my throat cut. I gave up fishing after that and went into the Queen's service. Mother sold the boat and went to live with a sister of hers at Truro. The Scilly Islands have changed since those times, and you'll meet as much kindness there if you're wrecked as you will anywhere else; but they were a rough lot in those days, and I had a pretty close shave of it, hadn't I?'

THE OLD PIT-SHAFT.

A TALE OF THE YORKSHIRE COALFIELDS.

BY G. A. HENTY.

BE careful, Mary; it is thick this morning here, and it will be worse on the hill. Thou hadst best keep to the path, lass; it is a bit longer, but thou can come to no harm there.'

'I will be careful, mother, never fear.'

The speaker was a bright-faced girl of about eighteen, the daughter of the underground manager of the high-ground colliery, and since she had been quite a little thing she had regularly taken her father's dinner out to him. She was the belle of the colliery village, and, young as she was, there were half-a-dozen young pitmen who had tried to gain her favour; but Mary Wickham had turned them off with a laugh. She was wilful and a little spoilt, and her suitors had gradually given the case up as hopeless, and it was allowed that the chances lay between Bob Boldero and Will Maxey. The former worked in the pit; the latter was assistant-engineer. He was a clever young fellow, knew his work thoroughly, and had worked hard to improve himself; and all knew that he would have old Tom

Thorne's berth as chief-engineer when the latter gave up work. Indeed, the manager of the mine had been heard to say that the young fellow was likely to rise a good deal higher than that before he had done.

Maxey was certainly a better match than his rival, and yet it was agreed in the village that Boldero had the better chance. He was the biggest and strongest man in the village, and women admire strength and stature. At ordinary times he was good-tempered and jovial, but when he took a cup too much, which was not often, he became a savage, and had seriously injured more than one man with whom he had quarrelled. Mary's mother had more than once said a word of warning to the girl; but she had only laughed and said, 'I can take care of myself.' Boldero was working on the night-shift, and was lounging at the door of his cottage when Mary passed. He at once joined her.

'It's thick on the hills, Miss Mary,' he said; 'if thou lik'st I will walk wi' thee.'

'I am quite safe by myself, Bob; I need no guide.'

'I will walk wi' thee, all the same, lass. I have done it afore when there was no call for it, and I have nowt to do.'

'Well, I don't mind,' she said. 'Mother was late with the dinner, and I must go straight across or father will be up before I get there.'

They walked along without speaking till they came to the point where the path across the hill left the road. It was well trodden, for it was always used by the colliers going to and from work. As

they turned off a man was coming down the road, but the mist was thicker here than it was in the village, and neither of them noticed him. He saw them, however, and stopped at the point where they had turned off.

‘It is Mary Wickham,’ he said to himself; ‘and it’s Bob Boldero with her.’ He felt a sharp pang at the thought that she had two days before refused his own proffered escort. ‘I will follow a bit,’ he said. ‘It’s so thick that one can scarce see one’s hand on the hill, and there are more than one old pit up there.’ Waiting till he could only just distinguish her figure, he followed.

The couple had not gone far when Boldero took advantage of the opportunity to ask Mary if she would be his wife.

‘It is not fair,’ she said with spirit, ‘to ask me such a question now, Bob. When you ask me, let it be in my own house and before my mother—or, at any rate, down in the village. It is not manly to ask it now when we are alone like this.’

‘Well, what will thy answer be when I ask thee there?’

‘I am not certain what it will be,’ she said. ‘I have to think it over.’

‘Ye might have known by this time,’ he said; ‘I have been courting you for six months.’

‘Well, Bob,’ she said, ‘you won’t better your case by going on talking now. As I said, this is not the place for it. And now I will thank you to turn back and let me go my own way; and I hope that you will wait a little longer before you ask me the question again.’

So saying, she turned and walked fast away. The collier stood looking after her with a savage expression on his face.

‘I believe,’ he muttered, ‘she cares far more for Maxey than she does for me. If she liked me best, why shouldn’t she have said so honest? Well, I will have it out with her this evening; and if she says no I will have it out with him.’

Mary had paid no attention to the path as she was talking. It had pleased her vanity to be courted by the champion of the village, but she had no idea of marrying him. She had often heard from other sources than her mother of his savage temper when in liquor, and had felt that she could not trust him; and although she had kept a brave face while he was talking to her, her heart had beat fast at being alone with him in such a spot. She hurried away without noticing where she was going, and it was a minute or two before she recovered her composure and found that she had left the path.

‘Oh dear, how tiresome!’ she said to herself; ‘and it is so dark I cannot see a yard ahead of me. However, I can’t be far from the path; it must lie this way;’ and she almost broke into a run.

Suddenly she crashed into a rotten fence; some loose planks under her feet gave way, and she felt herself falling. She gave a loud scream as the thought flashed into her mind that she was falling down one of the old shafts. A moment later she fell into water. As she came to the surface she again screamed as she struggled to keep herself

a float. It was but half a minute when two men ran up to the mouth of the shaft.

‘Run and fetch help, Bob,’ one exclaimed.

‘It ain’t no use,’ the other growled; ‘she will be drowned long before we can come back. Why don’t ye run yourself?’

The other man made no reply. He was gazing down into the depth, but could see nothing. Again there was a cry, this time a faint one. It came from directly under his feet. With a shout of encouragement, he ran round to the other side, and then dropped through the fog into the shaft. He had more than once looked down it idly, and knew that the water came to within thirty or forty feet of the top. There was no sensation of cold as he sank deeply below the surface.

The shaft had been sunk thirty years before, and carried down so far below where the sinkers expected to strike coal that it was evident that at this point there had been a serious fault. They had continued for some distance in the hope that it was merely a slip, and that the coal might be found lower; but they had come upon a spring of warm water, which came in so rapidly that the pump that had been rigged was wholly unable to cope with it. The work had then been abandoned, and the shaft filled to within forty feet of the surface. In cold weather a vapour ascended from the mouth of the shaft, showing that the water was still warm.

Two strokes when he came to the surface took Maxey to the side of the drowning girl. He threw his arm round her.

‘Do not struggle,’ he said; ‘you need have no

fear. There is a ledge a foot above the water-level. Put your hand on that for the present; I will see what I can do for you afterwards.'

Mary had kept her senses. She came of a stock accustomed to face death, and although she believed her fate certain, she had tried hard to keep her face above water. She felt along the face of the rock, and found the ledge her preserver had spoken of.

When the shaft was first sunk the ground was rough and loose until the solid rock was reached; and to prevent accidents it had been bricked from that point to the surface, and the rubbish packed in tightly behind the wall, which was four rings of brick thick. Below, the shaft was six inches narrower than the part bricked, a ledge of three inches being left, upon which beams had been placed across for the convenience of the sinkers. Looking down one day, Will Maxey had noticed this projection of the rock, and its existence had flashed across his mind in the emergency.

'Do not try to pull yourself up,' he said. 'Let yourself sink till the water touches your chin; then there will be no weight on your arms.'

'Who are you?' the girl asked. 'You are not Robert Boldero.'

'No; I am Will Maxey,' he said. 'I was a short way behind you, though you could not see me. It seemed to me to be dangerous for you to be walking in that fog. I lost sight of you and Boldero, and was standing still, not knowing what to do—for I saw that you had left the path—till I heard your scream. We both ran up together. He has gone off to get assistance, so we shall not have very long

to wait. It is fortunate that the water feels quite warm,' he went on quietly. 'Now I must see if I cannot make you more comfortable.'

It was quite light enough to see, for the fog had not penetrated far below the surface.

'I am going across to the other side,' he went on, 'and I can see by the look of the bricks that they are soaked with water from behind. If I can get a few of them out I will be able to make a place where you can sit comfortably. I will come across to you if you call.'

He struck off for the other side. Getting his big clasp-knife out of his pocket, and holding on by one hand to the ledge, he opened it with his teeth and thrust it in between two bricks. As he expected, the mortar had almost gone to decay. He scraped it out all round, but still found it a difficult task to move the brick, being afraid to use much force lest he might break his knife.

Suddenly he gave an exclamation of pleasure, remembering that he had in the loose pocket of his coat a cold-chisel which he had put there when he was at work, and had only noticed when on his way down to the village. It was some eight inches long, of three-quarter-inch steel, and the brick yielded as soon as he thrust it in. He took out two of the lowest bricks, and then the two above them; then, with a considerable effort, he raised himself so that he was able to get his elbow and forearm into the hole he had thus made above the ledge. He was now able to take down brick after brick. From time to time he spoke cheerfully to the girl, telling her how he was getting on.

‘I shall soon have a niche for you to sit in,’ he said; ‘it is easy work, for the mortar is like putty.’

When he had got the bricks out to the height of three feet, which was as far as he could reach, he began again at the bottom and removed the next tier to the same height.

‘Now, Miss Wickham,’ he said, ‘I have got your niche ready for you. Shall I take you across, or will you work round?’

‘I will work myself round,’ she said. ‘My arms are beginning to ache, but I am sure that I can get that little distance.’

He came across to her. ‘You need not be afraid of your hand slipping,’ he said. ‘I shall be close behind you, and will see that your head does not go under water.’

When she got round to the hole that he had made, he said, ‘Now I must help you up. I shall hold on by one hand to the ridge, and with the other I can lift you out of the water easily enough.’

It was, indeed, but a minute’s work, for as soon as her shoulders were level with the ledge she was able to bear herself up on her arms. He steadied her as she turned round.

‘There,’ he said; ‘you are absolutely safe now. It is a good half-hour since you fell, and assistance ought to be here in a few minutes.’

‘Can’t you make this hole larger, so that you can sit here too?’

‘No; this brickwork is as rotten as can be, and were I to move more bricks here those above might

come down with a run. We have done very well so far; do not let us risk anything. If help does not come soon I will make a place for myself farther on.'

'But surely help ought to be here by this time,' she said. 'Boldero ought to have got either to the works or the village in ten minutes at most. I am sure they would not lose a minute in coming with help.'

'You must not build too much on that. I agree with you that help ought to have been here by this time, but he may have lost his way in the fog.'

'Oh dear!' she exclaimed; 'then we shall have to wait here all night.'

'Not so bad as that,' he said. 'Even if Boldero is really lost, as soon as your father gets back to the village and says you never reached him with his dinner, you may be sure that every man will set out in search of you. He will leave the works at six; by half-past fifty men will set out with lanterns; by seven o'clock at the latest they ought to be here. They are sure to search these old shafts first of all.'

Another ten minutes passed. Maxey was thinking deeply. The silence was broken by the girl exclaiming, 'There is the handle of my basket close to the wall.'

A couple of strokes and he was beside it, and brought it to her.

'I am afraid the dinner is spoilt,' she said, with an attempt at a laugh.

'Yes; after being in this pit-water it can hardly be good eating. However, I will put the food on

the ledge; there is nothing like being prepared for an emergency. What is in this tin?’

‘Beer,’ she said.

‘Well, then, you had better take a good drink, Miss Wickham.’

‘I never touch beer,’ she said.

‘All the better,’ he replied; ‘it will do you all the more good. Please drink some now.’

She obediently took the tin, and taking out the cork, placed it to her mouth and drank.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘you must take some.’

‘I will take a drink presently,’ he said; ‘I am going to do some work.’

‘What are you going to do?’

‘I am going to try to make a sort of ladder, by which, even should they not find us, I can get out and fetch help. I don’t know that I can do it, but I am going to try. I must do it on the opposite side; it is drier there, and the bricks will be stronger. I dare not trust my weight on these.’

He crossed and set to work. As he expected, the mortar was harder; but after he had got two or three bricks out the work became easier. He first removed two bricks together, then the one above their centre, then two more, and so on. When he could reach no higher he shoved his knife deep between two bricks, so as to have something to steady him, and then pushed up, and holding his knife in one hand, continued the work with the other until he could stand up in the place that he had made; then he used the ends of the projecting bricks as steps, drove his knife in again as high as he could reach, and so continued the work. He

toiled on hour after hour. Twice a brick gave way with him and he fell back into the water, and the girl gave a scream of terror; but each time he clambered out again with a laugh. It was autumn, and when he was within six feet of the top darkness closed in.

‘Do come down,’ the girl said. ‘It must be past six, and help ought to come very soon now. It frightens me to think that you might fall again. Please come down and sit opposite to me.’

He did as she asked him, not sorry for a rest, for his arms and shoulders ached with the long strain.

‘That is right,’ she said. ‘Now you can talk. In the morning, if help does not come, you can finish the work. I sha’n’t mind stopping here all night if you will talk.’

‘I am not much of a hand at talking,’ he said, ‘but I will do my best.’

He chatted about village matters, but five minutes later he stopped suddenly.

‘There is a shout,’ he said; ‘they will soon be here now.’

The shouts grew louder. Then they could see the glare of torches above them. Mary heard her father’s voice: ‘Tie the rope round my body, and give me a torch. There is a broken rail here; I may find my poor girl’s body.’

Then Mary called out, ‘I am here, father, quite well and unhurt.’

A loud cheer broke out from the bank.

‘Don’t come down, father,’ she called out. ‘Lower a rope, and I will fasten it round my body.’

‘Nay, I will come down, lass, and see what has happened to thee, and how it is that you are alive.’

Half a minute later he began to descend, with the torch in his hand.

‘My dear lass!’ he called out as he saw her. ‘Why, it is a miracle, surely, that you should have found a place where you could sit.’

‘I didn’t find it, father; Will Maxey made it for me.’

‘Will Maxey!’ he exclaimed; for he had come down with his face towards his daughter. ‘Art thou dreaming, or art thou a little off thy head, as is but natural enough?’

‘Neither, father; if you turn round you will see him behind you.’

‘It be Will sure enough!’ he exclaimed. ‘How on earth did you come to fall down too?’

‘He didn’t, father; he jumped down to save me. A minute later I should have been drowned, for I knew nothing of this ledge, and was sinking when he came to my aid.’

‘Well, thou be a good un, Will, surely; but thou shall tell me all about it afterwards. Now I will get the lass up to the bank.’

He fastened the rope round her. ‘Hold tight by it, lass. Have no fear; it would bear ten of you.’

As soon as the girl was on the bank another cheer broke out. Her father had sat down in the place she had vacated, and was next hauled up. A couple of minutes later Maxey was also on the surface. The men above had heard what the girl, who was now sobbing in her father’s arms, had said, and the engineer was greeted with a cheer as loud as that

with which Mary had been received. Horny hands grasped his; others patted him on the shoulder.

'Tis lucky we thought of t'ould shaft,' one said. 'For aught we knew the lass might have wandered away miles in the fog, and we might never have found you.'

'I am glad you did,' he said; 'but it would have made no very great difference, for I should have been out by morning. I have made a ladder within eight feet of the top, and would have finished it the first thing in the morning.'

The men were incredulous, and it was not until they had fastened a torch to a rope and lowered it down that they were able to understand how he had managed it.

'Thou hast got thy head on the right way,' one of them said. 'If I had been there a hundred years I should never have thought of that plan, though it is simple enough when one sees it.'

'I suppose Boldero has not been heard of?' said Maxey.

'What has Boldero got to do with it?' one of the other men asked.

'He was here when I jumped in, and I sent him off to get assistance; and as he did not come, we supposed that he had got lost in the fog.'

'He is on the search somewhere,' the man said. 'We found him in the village when we got back, and he never said nowt about it.'

A threatening growl rose among the men.

But Boldero was not found; nor did he ever appear in the village again. He had run off at first at the top of his speed, but presently found that he too had

lost his way and had no idea of the direction in which he was going. Gradually his pace slackened. 'It's no good,' he muttered to himself; 'they are both drowned and dead by this time. If I tells about it they will call I a coward; best hold my tongue. Some of them must ha' seen me go out with the girl; but I shall say that she would have nowt of my company and went on by herself. I don't suppose they will ever find the body. When Maxey is missing they will suppose that she has run off with him.'

It was, indeed, two hours before he struck the road and was on his way back to the village. He turned in at once to bed, as he was on a night-shift, and lay there till the alarm was given, when he had joined in the search, taking care, however, to keep as far away as possible from the fatal shaft. When the cheers told him that those he supposed to be drowned were found and alive, he extinguished his torch and went off to find work in the Stafford pits.

This was many years ago. Will Maxey is now manager and part-owner of large engine-works in Manchester, and his wife and he sometimes talk over the hours in the old shaft and thank God for the accident that brought them together.

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ON THE CLIFF.

AN ADVENTURE AT BARMOUTH.

BY G. A. HENTY.

T the time of which I write Barmouth was a quiet little village. The whistle of the iron horse was not to be heard within many miles, and the passage of the coach between Dolgelly and Carnarvon was the sole event of the day.

There was one hotel, besides some half-dozen shops and other houses where lodgings were to be obtained; but slight as was the accommodation, it fully equalled the demand.

‘Just the place for a fellow to be able to sketch without people coming to look over his shoulder,’ was the comment of Hugh Carson, a young artist, as he took his first stroll upon the sands.

A tall, well-built young fellow, with legs rather long for his body, and a face rather heavy in repose, but bright and winning when he smiled. The tide was out, a few fishermen were mending their nets and tarring their boats, and a lady and child were down upon the rocks near the edge of the sea.

‘A bright bit of colour on those dark rocks,’ he said, ‘with the island on the left and the sea beyond, and that abrupt headland coming in—just the thing to begin with.’

He had his sketching-block under his arm and his colour-box in his pocket, and sitting down on the sand-hills, he set rapidly to work. For an hour and a half he worked steadily, and then the bright bit of colour and the child moved off towards the shore. Still he worked on at his sketch, and was almost startled when a shadow passed across his paper. He glanced up, and saw a girl of some twenty years of age, with a younger one of seven or eight. The child dropped the hand she was holding, and came fearlessly up.

‘Please may I look at your picture?’

He nodded silently, and went on with his painting.

‘Oh, Cousin Amy, such a pretty picture! And there are you and I out on the rocks. Do look!’

The girl glanced at the artist, but neither by look nor motion did he second the child’s request; and with a little shrug of her shoulders she turned away, and walked on slowly until overtaken by her cousin.

‘What a bear I am!’ the young man said to himself. ‘I ought to have got up and grinned and taken off my hat, I suppose, and asked her to look at it; but it’s no use—I can’t get on with women. I never can think what to say to them. I have no doubt she thought me a perfect bear—and so I am. But I suppose it’s my nature;’ and he went on with his painting. ‘One o’clock; it’s time to go in to dinner. The tide is coming up and covering the rocks; I will finish it to-morrow morning.’

The next day he worked until it was time for dinner, and was greatly contented with the result.

‘It will make a capital thing,’ he said. ‘I have

been very lucky with the lights. I do think it will be the best thing I have done.'

His pleasure was a little marred by the fact that the two girls had again been out on the rocks, and had on their return passed close by him; but this time the child had kept close to her cousin.

'Offended evidently,' was his muttered comment; 'and no wonder. I wish I was not such a bear.'

The following morning he was late in starting for a stroll across the sands. The tide had already turned, and there are few places on the coast where it comes in more rapidly than on the Barmouth sands. For a long time its approach is so gradual that it can hardly be noticed, but when it reaches a certain point it comes in with startling speed.

'There are those girls on the rocks again,' he said, and he shaped his course so as to carry him to the right of them. He had not gone fifty yards along the edge of the sand when he heard a loud cry behind him. He looked round, and saw that the elder girl, who was reading, had risen from a camp-stool on which she was sitting, and that the child was on the rocks, already cut off by a rapidly increasing stream of water. The cry of the child on discovering her situation was echoed by her companion, who was about to rush into the water when Hugh ran up.

'All right, little one!' he shouted cheerily. 'I'll fetch you out.'

So saying, he waded into the water, which was already nearly up to his waist, reached the little girl, took her in his arms, and carried her to the shore.

‘There you are, as right as possible,’ he said as he put her down; ‘but you must mind, missy, for the tides are very rapid here.’

‘Thank you so very much, sir,’ the elder girl said; ‘it is most kind of you.’

The artist looked into the flushed face of the girl, and the eyes in which the tears were standing, and his habitual shyness fell upon him. Muttering something about its being no odds at all, he raised his hat and, turning upon his heel, again pursued his walk.

‘He really is a bear,’ Amy Herbert said as she hurried off with the child towards the sand-hills, pursued by the fast-rising tide; ‘and yet, by his voice, I am sure he could be very nice if he liked.’

Amy Herbert had no experience whatever of shy men. She was the only daughter of a very wealthy Manchester cotton-spinner, and Manchester does not class shy young men among its productions. She was accustomed to admiration, for she was pretty and an heiress, and in both capacities made much of; but though a little wayward and wilful, from always having her own way, she was really unspoiled, and was as bright and lovable a girl as was to be found in the metropolis of cotton.

For the next two days Hugh Carson missed the young lady and child from the shore, but several times saw the flutter of a light-coloured dress high up on the hills behind Barmouth.

‘That rising tide has given her a fright,’ he said to himself, ‘and they’ve taken to the hills. Rather a nuisance, because I have done with these flats, and shall be doing the hills myself. However, they are

extensive enough to prevent our running against each other, as we always seem to be doing here.'

In fact, as Hugh and his acquaintances took their meals at about the same hour, and went in at the very last moment, it is not singular that each day they had, either morning, afternoon, or evening, met at least once in the quiet little street; and each time Hugh raised his hat, Miss Herbert bowed frigidly, and her little cousin nodded brightly. Once when he passed the door of their lodging just as they were going in, the child ran across the road as her cousin entered, put her hand into his, and talked to him for two or three minutes, conveying to him the thanks of her mamma, who was not strong and did not go out much, for having carried her across the tide. For the next three days Hugh Carson was engaged in painting a picturesque old farmhouse lying far on the hill. The subject being a good one, he set to to produce a finished picture on the spot, and worked at it from early morning as long as the light lasted, making his breakfast and lunch off milk and bread-and-cheese obtained at the farmhouse. Upon the third evening he was returning from his work, walking along the edge of the hill, and looking down upon the sea, when he came upon the little girl lying on the ground crying bitterly.

'Why, little one, what is the matter?'

The child, who had not heard him approaching, leapt to her feet, and upon seeing who it was a look of pleasure flashed across her tear-stained face.

'Oh, please, sir, do help me! Cousin Amy has tumbled down the hill.'

‘Good gracious, child, where has she fallen?’ Hugh said in horror; for the spot where they stood was above one of the steepest slopes between Bar-mouth and Harlech.

‘Down there, sir. She was picking a flower when she slipped; and I can’t get at her, but I can see her;’ and the child led the young artist to a point farther on, where the plateau projected, and from which the face of the hill where Amy had fallen was visible.

The slope where she had slipped was very steep, but became even steeper lower down. Then a rocky ledge projected, and below it an abrupt precipice some fifty feet high. Amy Herbert lay on the ledge. She had rolled down on to it, and had evidently struck her head, for she was insensible. This ledge was about three feet wide, and from the position in which the girl lay, it was probable that, at the first movement made as she came to, she would roll over the edge.

‘All right, little one; don’t cry; I will get to Cousin Amy. She has hurt herself, but I dare say she will be all right when I get to her.’

Hugh spoke cheerfully, but he was by no means sure that the girl was not killed. He looked closely at the grassy slope. It would be easy enough to slide down; but, once down, there was no getting up again. He was fully a mile and a half from the village; but he dared not run for aid, for if the girl partially recovered she might be dashed to pieces before his return. It was evident that he must slide down to her. But what to do with the child puzzled him. He was afraid to send her to the village by

herself, or to leave her alone on the top ; besides, if they were to stop on that ledge till help came, it would be much more pleasant with the child there, both for Amy and himself.

‘Look here, Pussy,’ he said after a minute’s thought ; ‘will you be a good, quiet little girl if I take you with me down to Cousin Amy ?’

The child nodded seriously.

‘Here goes, then,’ he said. ‘Now, you take hold of my hand very tight, and we will go down as far as we can ; then we’ll lie down on the grass, you will put your arms round my neck, and we shall slide down.’

So it was done, not without danger ; but Hugh was strong and steady, and lying on his face, with one arm round the child, he held on to the tufts of grass, and let himself slide as gently as he could. Still, his heart beat fast for an instant when, on reaching the steepest point of the slope, they slipped down with a rush the last fifteen feet to the ledge where Amy lay, half over the brink of the sheer fall below.

‘Now, Pussy, you sit down quite quiet while I see to Cousin Amy.’

Very anxiously the young artist lifted the girl’s head from the grass. There was a little pool of blood below it, which had flowed from a wound just above the ear. He put his fingers to her wrist, and, after a minute of anxious suspense, he felt a very faint, flickering pulse.

‘Thank God !’ he murmured devoutly.

Then he took out a whisky-flask, and poured a few drops between the clenched teeth. Again and again

he did this, the child all the time sitting perfectly quiet, watching with frightened eyes. Presently the girl sighed faintly.

‘Take hold of Cousin Amy’s hand,’ Hugh said, ‘and when you see her open her eyes speak to her gently. Tell her to lie still; put your face close to hers, so that she may see you when she opens her eyes.’

Hugh was sitting on the ground supporting the girl, whose head rested on his shoulder. Presently there was a movement of the eyelids, and then slowly and languidly the eyes opened.

‘There, Cousin Amy, you are better now. Lie quite quiet. You have hurt yourself, and must be very good.’

The eyes expressed recognition and a faint wonder, and then closed again. Hugh waited a little, and then poured a few more drops of whisky between her lips. This time the effect was more decided. She moved, shook her head, and tried to avoid the mouth of the flask. Then she looked up again.

‘What is it?’ she said faintly. ‘What are you doing? Where am I?’

‘You must be quiet and good,’ the child said positively. ‘You must not move; the gentleman says so.’

This time the speech was vaguely understood, for she looked beyond the child’s face to that of Hugh, closed her eyes again as if she doubted them, looked again, and then made an effort to raise her head. Then Hugh spoke, gently but decisively.

‘My dear young lady, you must lie quite quiet. You have fallen down and hurt yourself, and you are faint and weak. You are quite safe where you are; but you cannot move, for we are on the side of the

hill, and must wait till help comes. Your cousin is here with you.—Kiss her, Pussy.'

Amy Herbert listened in a sort of confused wonder. She did not understand in the least, except that she was told to be quiet in firm, authoritative tones, such as had not been addressed to her since she was a child. The warm kiss of her little cousin seemed to assure her that all was safe and right, and with a little sigh she closed her eyes again, and was soon breathing quietly. Then the child turned to Hugh.

'Amy's gone to sleep. My name isn't Pussy, but Ida—Ida Herbert.'

'All right, Ida. I'll call you so in future. Now, Ida, when you stand up, can you see the road down below there?'

'Just see it,' the child said; 'but it is getting dark. When are we going home?'

'I am afraid we are not going home to-night, Ida; certainly not unless some one comes along that road, and there is not much chance of that.'

'Where are we to sleep?' Ida asked, in surprise.

'We must sleep just where we are. Cousin Amy will sleep here, and you shall curl up close to me and lay your head against me on the other side; and I don't think you'll be cold.'

'But I want supper before I go to bed.'

'Ah! you can't have supper to-night, Ida. But it will be great fun, you know, sleeping out here for a bit; and I expect that presently your mamma will send people out to look for you, and then we shall hear them shout, and we shall shout back again; and then they'll come with some ropes, and up we shall go to the top. Now, shall I tell you a story?'

‘Oh yes, please,’ Ida said, delighted.

‘Will you sit quiet by me, then? And when you feel sleepy, you just lay your head down and go off to sleep. I will go on with my story till you’re asleep; but we must talk very low, else we shall wake Cousin Amy.’

For an hour he told stories of fairies and enchanters, and then the little head leant gradually against his waistcoat, and in five minutes he stopped in the middle of his narrative. Then Amy Herbert spoke.

‘I am not asleep; I have been awake for some time, and have been thinking. You are the gentleman who rescued Ida off the rocks, are you not?’

‘Yes,’ Hugh said.

‘I thought so. Now, please, how came you and Ida here, and where are we, and why don’t we go home?’

‘You rolled down a steep grassy slope on to a ledge. You struck your head in falling, and were insensible for a time. I came up, and should have run off for assistance; but I feared, if you moved before I came back, you would fall over another fifty feet; so I took Ida and slipped down to you.’

‘Can’t I move?’ the girl asked presently.

‘Are you uncomfortable?’

‘No,’ she said shyly.

‘Then you had better lie still,’ Hugh said decisively. ‘The ledge is very narrow, and you are weak, and I dare say giddy, for you lost a great deal of blood; so you really might fall over if you sat up. With my arm round you you are quite safe.’

And Hugh emphasised the fact by drawing her still more closely to him. Her slight figure yielded

to the pressure, and with a little movement, which was very like the nestle with which Ida had pre-faced her subsidence to sleep, Amy Herbert lay quiet, and in a very few minutes Hugh was sure, from her regular breathing, that she too was asleep.

‘It must be nearly ten o’clock,’ Hugh said to himself. ‘I should think we ought very soon to get out of this. The old lady would be fidgety by half-past seven, alarmed by half-past eight, and by half-past nine she ought to have had all Barmouth out with torches. But some women delay so long before they set about a thing in earnest. They begin to fidget long before a man does, but they don’t set to work to take decisive steps. Still, searchers ought to be out by this time. I am beginning to feel horribly cramped. I suppose some fellows would like this sort of thing; but I don’t see any point in it whatever.’

In another quarter of an hour Hugh saw several lights coming along the road below, and could hear faint shouts, which seemed to be echoed by a party proceeding along the hill. They were moving but slowly, for there were lights half-way up the slope, and they were evidently searching very carefully. The wind was blowing towards him, so it was useless for Hugh to try and return their shouts. Gradually they came nearer, and he determined to make an effort, but to do so it was necessary to stand up. He moved slightly, and the elder girl moved also.

‘Wake up, please,’ he said; ‘help is at hand.’

She raised herself at once.

‘I do think I have been asleep. I feel ever so much better.’

‘I will stand up to shout,’ Hugh said. ‘Will you

lean back against the hill? I will lay your cousin down with her head in your lap. She is as sound as a top. Now for it!' and standing up, Hugh gave a shout with all the power of his lungs.

There was a pause in the movement of the lanterns, and then a shout.

'Hallo-a-a!' Hugh shouted again; 'this way!'

Rapidly the lanterns came flittering along the road till they were down in front of them.

'Here we are! Here are the ladies!' Hugh shouted.

'Any one hurt?'

'Not much; but we can't get either up or down. You must let a rope down to us from above. Here we are;' and Hugh struck a match and lighted a large piece of paper. 'Have the party above got ropes?'

There was shouting backwards and forwards, but the party above had not got ropes.

'Send back for them at once,' Hugh shouted; 'and be sure and tell the lady that no damage is done here.'

'How do you feel now?—I was going to say Cousin Amy,' he laughed, 'but I really haven't the pleasure of knowing your name.'

'Amy Herbert.'

'How do you feel now, Miss Herbert?'

'I feel weak, and rather headachy,' she said; 'but there is nothing really the matter with me. What an escape I have had!'

'Yes, you had a narrow squeak of it,' Hugh said frankly; 'just another pound or two of impetus and you would have gone over the ledge.'

She was silent, and he went on:

‘Do you object to smoke? Because if you don’t I should really like to light my pipe.’

‘Not at all,’ Amy said.

‘There’s something comfortable about a pipe,’ Hugh said when it was fairly alight; ‘somehow one can talk when one gets a pipe alight.’

‘I think men can talk at all times,’ Amy said, with a flash of her usual spirits.

‘Some men can,’ Hugh said. ‘I can talk with men; but, do you know, somehow I can’t talk with women. I can talk with you now because I don’t see you, and because I am smoking; but I should feel horribly uncomfortable if I met you in the morning.’

‘I did not know any men were shy with women nowadays,’ Amy said.

‘Shy?’ Hugh repeated. ‘Well, yes, I suppose it is a sort of shyness with me. I never had any sisters, and so, you see, I never got in the way of talking to girls. It’s very annoying sometimes, and makes people think me a bear. I suppose you thought so. You must have done so.’

‘Yes,’ Amy said, ‘I did think you rather a bear. I am not accustomed to shy young men, and simply fancied you did not want to speak to strangers. And now, please, tell me exactly what happened, because I shall have to tell aunt, and I have only a confused idea of what has taken place.’

Again Hugh told her the facts.

‘Then I owe my life to you,’ the girl said when he had finished.

‘I really don’t think you do,’ Hugh said in a matter-of-fact way. ‘I question very much if you

would have come round out of your faint before I could have brought help from Barmouth. However, of course, I acted for the best, and it avoided all risk. There was no danger in getting down to you; the little one and I slipped down as easily as possible. If I thought you were going to tell me to-morrow that you were very grateful, or anything of that sort, I give you my honour I should go right away by the coach to Carnarvon.'

The girl felt, by the tone of Hugh's voice, that there was no affectation about him—that he really meant what he said.

'I may just say "Thank you" now?' she asked quietly.

'Yes, just "Thank you,"' he said lightly.

'If I were a man you would shake hands over it?' the girl asked.

'Yes,' Hugh said.

'Please give me your hand.'

He stooped down, and she put her hand into his.

'Thank you,' in a deep, quiet, earnest voice.

Then, as he rose again, she went on in a changed voice:

'Now, mind, it is a bargain; we have shaken hands on it. I am not to be grateful, and you are not to be afraid of me, but are just to be as natural with me as with Ida.'

'That is a bargain,' Hugh said, with a laugh. 'I don't think I shall feel shy with you in future. I never talked so much with a woman in my life. I suppose it's because I can't see your face.'

'I don't know whether to take that for a compliment or the reverse,' Amy laughed.

‘The reverse, of course,’ Hugh said, laughing too; ‘compliments are not in my line. Ah! here they are with the rope. They have been precious quick about it;’ and Amy Herbert felt there was a real compliment in the tones in which he spoke. ‘But you must wake Ida. How soundly she sleeps! Now let me help you on to your feet.’

Even with the aid of the rope, it was a work of considerable difficulty to get Amy Herbert up to the top of the slope; for she was weak and shaken, and unable to do much to help herself. At last it was managed; and then she was assisted down a steep path close by to the road below, where a carriage from the hotel was waiting for them.

‘Will you come up and see my aunt?’ Amy asked as they stopped at the door.

‘Not to-night, thank you. I will come in the morning to see how you are after the shake; and please,’ he said, ‘tell your aunt of our bargain. It would be awful to come up to be thanked.’

‘Good-night,’ the girl said. ‘I won’t forget. Come early.—Now, Ida, come along; you will soon be in bed.’

Two months later Mr Herbert was walking up and down his breakfast-room in a towering passion. Amy was sitting in a great arm-chair.

‘It is monstrous! it is incredible!’ Mr Herbert exclaimed. ‘Here you, for whom I have looked for a capital match, and who refused three of the very best men in the district last year, are away for two months and a half at this beggarly Welsh village, and you come back and deliberately tell me that you have

engaged yourself to an artist—a fellow I never heard of.’

‘Dear old daddy,’ Amy said quietly, ‘don’t get angry about it. Come and sit down and talk it over reasonably, as you always do things with me.’

‘No, no, Amy. I know what your reasonable talking means. I am not to be coaxed or wheedled or made a fool of. It’s all very well when you want a pair of new ponies or anything of that kind you have set your mind on, but there is a limit to everything.’

‘Well, but we must talk the question over, daddy.’

‘Not at all—not at all; no talk is necessary. You tell me you want to marry this fortune-hunting artist. I say at once I won’t hear of it; that it’s out of the question; that I will not hear a single word about such a ridiculous affair.’

‘Now, why should you call him a fortune-hunter?’ Amy said, seizing at once upon the weak point. ‘He has not an idea that there is any fortune in the case. He saw me staying in poky lodgings at Barmouth, and beyond the fact that I live at Manchester he knows nothing. He tells me that he has enough for us to live on very quietly, in addition to his profession. So, you see, he can’t be called a fortune-hunter.’

‘Well, well! it makes no difference. The thing is monstrous, and I will not hear of it.’

‘Well, daddy, I will do just as you like, and I won’t say any more about it now; but, of course, tomorrow I must talk about it, because it is out of the question that I should break my word which I have given, and should make him unhappy, and be awfully unhappy myself. So I shall have to talk about him,

and you will have to listen'—the father had sat down now—'because though, as my papa, you have a perfect right to say, "I will not consent to your marrying this man," still, you know, I must talk about a thing which is making me very unhappy. And it will be so much better and nicer, daddy'—and she went over to him now and sat herself down on his knee, with her arm round his neck—'if you give in at once. Because, you know, you can't keep in a naughty temper with me long; and besides, you would be very unhappy if I was unhappy; and at last, you know very well, you will have to give up being cruel and cross, and will tell me to be happy my own way.'

'Amy,' her father said, trying to look very stern, 'I have spoiled you. I have allowed you to tyrannise over me.'

'No, daddy, I can't allow that—certainly not tyrannise. I have led you for your own good, and you have been as happy as the day is long'—

'And now,' he continued, ignoring the protest, 'I am to reap the reward of my folly. That you would marry a man of high rank I expected; even if you married a first-rate man of business I should be contented. But an artist!'

'Well, daddy, we won't talk any more about it to-day. Now, I'll just smooth those naughty cross wrinkles, and I'll kiss you on each cheek and the middle of your nose. There! now it looks like itself. There! ten o'clock striking, and you not off! Mind, I shall expect you up to luncheon.'

So Mr Herbert went off shaking his head, and although still determined, yet at heart very doubtful

as to his power of resistance. Amy went to her special sanctum and wrote her first letter to Hugh. The following sentences show that she had no doubt whatever on the subject :

‘Daddy does not take quite kindly to the notion as yet. He doesn’t know you, you see, and it has of course come upon him a little suddenly ; but he is the very best and kindest of all the daddies in the world, and in a very few days he will see it in quite the right light. It is of no use your writing or coming to me here till he is quite reasonable ; but I expect by this day week to have everything arranged. I will let you know what train to come by, and will meet you at the station.’

It is to be presumed that Amy thoroughly understood her father ; but, at any rate, it was exactly that day week that Hugh Carson, having obeyed instructions and got out at the station directed, five miles from Manchester, was a little surprised and much disappointed at not seeing her upon the platform.

‘Your luggage, sir ! Are you the gentleman for The Hawthorns ? Very well, sir, I will send up the portmanteau. Miss Herbert is in the pony-carriage.’

‘Bless me, Amy !’ Hugh said, after the first greeting, as they drove off. ‘You used to talk about your pony-trap, but this turn-out is pretty enough to attract attention in the Park. Amy’—and he looked at her with a puzzled glance—‘you’re not a swell, are you ?—because that would be dreadful.’

‘Well, Hugh, if being a swell means having lots of money, I suppose I am one, for daddy has lots upon lots. He’s got cotton-mills, you know. But there’s nothing dreadful in that.’

‘You ought to have told me, Amy,’ Hugh said a little gravely.

‘*Pas si bête,*’ the girl said. ‘In the first place, it was nice to know that you fell in love with me without knowing whether I had a halfpenny; in the second place, you would very likely have run away if you had thought I was rich; and, to tell you the truth, Master Hugh, I had no idea of letting you run away. There, Hugh, there’s the house; isn’t it pretty?’

‘It’s almost a palace,’ Hugh said, in dismay.

‘Yes; and there’s papa at the door waiting to greet you. Now, look quite pleasant and bright, Hugh, for of course I want him to like you almost as much as I do.’

IYVINDA.*

By EDWIN LESTER ARNOLD, Author of *Phra the Phœnician*, &c.

CHAPTER I.

A HUNDRED aurei for her alive, or fifty dead,' cried Aulus Atticus, our master of the horse, clapping his silver cup down so angrily on the table that the Rhenish wine sprang out and ran to the floor in a red pool. 'A hundred aurei from the public chest to the man who will bring us this Pictish she-cat bound, or her head, it matters little which. Are we to be thwarted in our marches and have all the country stirred up like a hornet's nest by another Boadicea? I tell you, sirs,' he said to us who sat in our dinted armour at mess that night with him, playing at luxury on poor soldiers' fair—'I tell you this northern witch, this Iyvinda, daughter of Galgacus, is at the bottom of all the opposition to us. It is she that has fired

* The scene of this story is laid in and around the estate of Delvine or Inchtuthill, near Dunkeld, Perthshire, which the writer assumes is the site of the battle of Mons Grampius between Agricola and the Caledonians. This is referred to in a monograph by Sir Alexander Muir Mackenzie, entitled *Memoirs of Delvine* (Perth, 1903).

these sluggish northern churls with most inconvenient patriotism and mended their jealousies with her magic tongue. It were better for Rome that she were dead than any five thousand of her countrymen; and as a good soldier I vow I would go fifty miles to-morrow to see her burnt.'

We laughed, and shaking our heads, looked into our wine-cups. It was not that we did not covet the helmetful of gold Aulus offered, since pay was scarce and everything that made life pleasant in these northern wilds was worse than costly. But the daughter of Galgacus! Again we laughed, and, laughing, looked at the fine, sunburnt fellow at the head of our table. He might as well have asked us to bring him one of the goddesses from Mount Ida!

'Come, Flavius,' he said presently, turning to me, a centurion in his command, 'you were ever reckoned a lady's man. Your brass still glitters when ours is green with the mildew of these hills; never was battle set so early but you found time to crimp your hair for it; and, above all, you have more knowledge of the barbarous speech of the rascal Caledonian tribesmen than any of us. What do you say? Could you not get sight of this lady somehow, and having bedazzled her with your presence, lure her to secret tryst where a handful of our fellows might pounce on the lovely prize? 'Tis a wild fancy, no doubt; but you have wit to plot and pluck to venture, if any have.'

Could I? I shook my head; and yet—and yet! That golden blood-money dazzled my fancy. Jove! how much it would buy! And then again, if by some desperate luck I succeeded, promotion was

certain—quick promotion, such as I might hope in vain for any other way. No, it was impossible. Who was I, Flavius Quintillus, a poor soldier of fortune in the army of Agricola, Roman legate in Britain, to snatch this northern wild-cat single-handed from her nest? And yet! Atticus had somehow fired my fancy; I could not shake the idea off. All that night after we had gone to rest I thought about it; it haunted my dreams, dogging my waking fancies; and, to be brief, ere the second day was out I had made up my mind to go on the quest.

‘No, no, Flavius,’ said Atticus when he heard my decision; ‘it was only a foolish suggestion of mine, born of the third wine-cup. It would be sheer folly, and just throwing away a good officer. Let us hear no more of it.’

But I was determined, and in the long-run he had to give way, for luck was on my side. Two ambassadors from the Picts, who had come in to us about an exchange of prisoners, were returning that day, and, as it chanced, hoped to fall in with our gentle firebrand, ‘out hunting,’ they said, in the woods beyond the Tay. We guessed, though, that that hunting had more to do with us than boar or beaver. Now, could I go with them, half the difficulty were solved. Then Atticus saw that, and, loving dangerous quests himself, at last fell in with my wishes.

So, behold me, an accredited envoy in turn, sallying out next morning with those returning ambassadors, bedecked from head to heel, my black hair curled, my brass glinting like water, a brave

steed below me, and the vainglorious heart of a boy in my breast. Never had larks sung so gaily; never had scabbard made pleasanter music on stirrup-irons, or wild moorland breezes tasted so sweet. And between then and now the gods made a man of me, taught me in a few short days the splendour of hope and the dignity of patience, and the bitterness of a black disappointment which will ever be cherished amongst the dearest and sacredest things of my existence.

But of this I knew nothing as we stretched away into the rolling pine-clad hills. Of fear I had none; of remorse at the object of my errand none. Why should I hesitate to entrap if I could, by fair means or by foul, this she-cat who annoyed and thwarted us when all Caledonia lay at our feet? A sour, lean virago I pictured her, all fire and spleen, whose spiteful tongue wagging up and down the country put the tribesmen into heart against us; it would be a blessed thing to send the soul of such a drab to rant in Hades if it might anyhow be managed; and if not, why, I could but come back as I went, safe in my guise of friendly negotiator.

So on we rode, and at noon fell in with some wandering pedlars coming down to the coast, and from them heard the chieftainess had been out to the west a fortnight since, and was now passing home by easy stages with but a slight following. She was lying that night not six miles ahead, those fur-wrapped hucksters said, and I vowed a stone altar to Mercury, patron of thieves, on the spot if my errand should turn out as well as this seemed to promise.

We lost our way once ; and, somewhat tired and travel-stained, it was nightfall before we came in sight of a cluster of Pictish huts in a forest glade, with many fires about them, as though more were in the village than it was meant to hold. Then, perhaps, my errand did look more serious than it had done by sunshine ; but there was nothing for it now save to push boldly on. So, trotting ahead down the slope, we were within the circle of the fires before any knew of our coming.

Truly it was the wild-cat's nest ! Every hut was full to overflowing of Pictish folk, and all outside they were trotting to and fro, busy over the evening meal, or tending their mountain ponies, near a hundred of which were tethered about ; while chariots stood unhorsed in one place with their war-scythes off and strapped along the shafts, arms were piled against lichened rocks, brass-centred bucklers lay around, and under neighbouring branches hung deer carcasses from which cooks were busy hacking supper-steaks. Truly had I got into the thick of them ; and putting the best face on matters that might be, I dismounted. Striding up to a big fellow standing with his back to me as he leisurely ate some roasted meat from a spit, I clapped him on the shoulder and called out, 'Hullo, comrade !'

That bulky savage jumped at my salutation a foot high in the air ; then, seeing my Roman armour, and still holding spit in one hand and meat in other, glared at the forest around and up at the sky to see if any more of my kind were dropping thence.

'Comrade,' I said, 'I have come to see your chieftainess, Iyvinda. Is she here with you ?'

‘Iyvinda?’ growled the fellow, with a look of gaping stupidity.

‘Ay, Iyvinda,’ I said; and to and fro for a minute we bandied the name without getting any more forward.

Meanwhile, as you may guess, others had come round, a wide staring ring of barbarian faces, most of whose owners had never looked on a Roman before; and one ugly rogue, constituting himself their champion, set himself in front of me and came slowly forward, rolling his eyes, raising and lowering his body, and drawing his sword inch by inch in a most warlike way.

Before he could do any mischief, however, a third thrust himself between us, a man of much better appearance; and waving the others back, he turned and said:

‘Forgive them, stranger; that first one is a fool by nature, just as this other is a cut-throat by profession. You are a Roman?’

‘May Heaven never ask you any harder riddle, sir,’ I answered.

‘And either a madman to come here alone, or a messenger claiming the protection of that name.’

‘A messenger, good friend, and here are my sponsors,’ I said as those who had come with me rode up. These coming made all things plain; and after a few words with them, my new friend told me, to my delight, the chieftainess was there, ‘in yonder long barn of turf and timber, supping with her friends.’ Then, signing to me, he forthwith led the way through the scattered camp-fires. Near the door he suddenly turned and asked me simply,

‘Has your general sent you to say he will surrender?’

‘No,’ I laughed; ‘he has not come quite to that; but so much I may say, that his errand is friendly. And now to the lady.’

He led me on without another word, across the clearing, through a group of wondering guards, up a couple of solid oak stairs, and so into a great, low chamber such as might be used for storing food in peace-time. Now there were rough tables built of turf down the sides, at which many men sat eating, their shields and spears and furs hanging behind them on pegs driven into the walls. In the centre were servitors hurrying here and there with drinking-horns or wooden trenchers of smoking venison. Across the top was another table with half-a-dozen men of better degree—and one woman! They were talking eagerly amongst themselves, and so great was the clamour of the menials, and so thick the haze from the spluttering torches fixed about the hall, that none noted me until I was standing, arms folded, in respectful silence before the daïs.

Then the woman looked up and saw me, and the others saw me, and silence fell on every one. The meat stopped half-way to the mouths of the astonished guests; the wondering servitors stood at a stop, the gravy trickling from their tilted platters to the sandy floor; the very torches seemed to cease their splutter for the moment. And then the princess—for I could not doubt it was she whose name was known wherever the Roman tongue was spoken—rose and wonderingly asked of my guide:

‘A prisoner, Uf?’

‘Daughter of Galgacus,’ he answered, bending low, ‘a free man till you wish otherwise, and new come into camp.’

‘He ought to be an honest ambassador who arrives so trustfully,’ said the princess; and coming down from her table, she approached within a couple of yards, and there stood unabashed, looking as gravely at me as I looked at her in turn.

By Venus’s self, never was such a contrast to what I had imagined! Graceful with the suppleness that comes of constant exercise in the open air, that lady wore a dress of dark-green fabric not unlike that of our own women, but closer fitting. On her feet, and reaching to her knee, were buskins of fine brown fur, cross-laced. About her middle was a belt beautifully worked with native gold, a wallet hanging on the right and a dagger on the left. Round her neck was a necklace of amber plates and beads, while a string of amber threaded on green flax bound up the loose coils of her ruddy hair. She was of middle stature, and mayhap twenty-five years of age. Never did a more keen or trimly damsel step on heather, I thought in our first moment of acquaintance; but it was her face that moved me. Never before had I seen a countenance of such mingled sweetness and dignity; never one that could change so quickly or be so eloquent of the keen mind and brave heart that burnt within. Even at that first moment of our introduction I felt its magic; and now that it is a memory—now that I can recall it tender with woman-love, flushed in pride, stern-set in anger, or white with coming death

—it is to me like some beautiful book to which one turns and turns again, ever marvelling lovingly at the bitter-sweetness of a story that promised so much yet gave nothing but a splendid disappointment.

The world was a little different to me from that moment, and I started guiltily when the lady, breaking the silence, said :

‘Your message is not urgent, Roman?’

‘It can wait, madam, your pleasure.’

‘Why, then, let it, and come and sup with us; there are few messages that do not sound better after meals than before;’ and taking me by the hand in the simplest way, she led me to her table and made room for me between her and a brother, a brave-looking boy of seventeen, who welcomed my coming with no great good-humour.

Such a meal we had! Never shared I one living longer in my memory. Never came heather-reared venison from embers tasting better than the meat from the spits of those wild-wood cooks; never were drinking-horns deeper than those which they filled to the silver rims for me, the friendly enemy, that night. Never was upper air fuller of barbarian songs than in Iyvinda’s shed that night: never was lower air made more dulcet to me than by her quick, incisive talk, her shrewd questions and ready answers. We talked and drank till half the thanes were sleeping where they sat, and all the camp without was hushed in silence; and then the lady, after the courtesy of her country, rose and kissed the stranger upon the cheeks, and sent him in charge of her brother to lodgment outside, mind dancing

with strong mead, heart pulsing with a new-born fancy, and senses all in a tangle.

The camp was astir next morning by the time the level sun threw a golden web of light over the forest lawns, and the chieftainess sent for me in the midst of the bustle.

‘Quintillus,’ she said—for I had told her my name overnight, and it sounded wonderfully pleasant on her tongue—‘to-day the greater part of these men you see with me turn home; they are but a convoy come so far from civility. My brother and I, with but the handful left, travel slowly on to my father’s town upon the big river. Now, what say you to coming at least part of the way with us? Your errand done, and nothing urgent, our company will save from chance annoy upon the road; and—and,’ she added, hesitating a little and blushing slightly, I thought, though mayhap it was only the red of sunrise coming in at the door—‘and in truth I am very eager to hear more as we ride of that city of yours men say is built on seven hills, of your great men, and of your women—how they dress and bind their hair; you remember you told me nothing of that last night.’ Then she suggested we might afterwards sleep that evening in a glen near a tall menhir all the British knew, and not fifteen miles as raven flies from where Atticus lay camped with the front of our invading army.

Here was a chance! At once the scheme I had made flashed back upon my mind. The princess herself had baited the trap. To hesitate now was to lose her for good and all. Yes, I would go with

her for certain; and when so much was settled, hot on my purpose, I went out and presently spoke privately to a camp-follower, a pedlar who dealt in Gaulish trinkets—a low, mercenary-looking rascal suited to my purpose—asking him if he would secretly take a message for me to the legions. At first he demurred, guessing that were dangerous which must go covertly; but when I offered as recompense a handful of gold pieces, ‘more than ever he was like to see else in the rest of his greedy life,’ his yellow eyes blinked, and he said he would venture. So him I took into a thicket, and there, tearing off the unused margin of Agricola’s pass, scrawled a hasty line to my fellow-conspirator, telling him how things were, of the lonely halt that night, and ending by saying if he could bring a score of swords up in hot haste and ambush us, the prize were ours. That missive the pedlar hid inside his dirty legging; and ten minutes after, his pack upon his back and astride of his ragged pony, he had slipped away southwards down the hillside.

We, too, started before the sun was clear of the pines, Iyvinda with her brother and I, on either side and behind us a scanty dozen of riders. The lady was blithe as a lark, witty and keen and clever—all the woman for the nonce—and making the gray old rocks echo to her honest laughter as we rode down the narrow forest-roads, and now singing a verse or two of song in her own harmonious tongue, or reining close up to chat with me about the wide world beyond her native hills that interested her so greatly: a splendid girl, ruddy and brave and strong, linking a man’s ardour with a

woman's tenderness. If she were mine, as I hoped she might be, not all the world should take her from me; to win her was the first thing, I argued with myself, and then a hundred ways would open of saving her from the shameful fate they planned. So we rode until the afternoon had come, and then that happened which, though I thought little of it at the time, meant much to me.

As we ambled between the birch thickets, the broad river glinting far away in the vale below, two fellows overtook us, and falling into the rear, sent word they would speak with the princess and her brother. Little recking of their conclave, I went carolling on alone till, half-an-hour later, those two came up again; and now the boy's brow was black as thunder, while Iyvinda had two angry spots upon her cheeks, and all her lightness was gone.

'No ill news, dear lady?' I asked gaily.

'News,' she answered, 'of a false friend whom we liked and trusted; but news in time.'

'Great Jove be thanked for that!' I cried innocently; whereon the proud woman looked at me, and her expressive lip curled disdainfully, though she said nothing more.

But now a blight hung over our cavalcade which I tried in vain to lighten. The brother rode, grim and watchful, on my left; the men behind whispered together, scowling whenever my face turned towards them. As for the princess, wrath and hesitation seemed at war within her. So we rode on a mile or two; then suddenly turning, she asked, 'What would you do, Roman, were I a prisoner in your camp?'

Without waiting to think, I blurted out the first thing my lover-heart prompted to my tongue: 'Do, lady! Why, sell my life a hundred times ere yours should harm.' That answer, now I know all, it seems to me, saved my life.

'Is that truth?' asked the girl a little more softly.

'Ay; by all the holy gods I swear it!'

Whereon Iyvinda came closer in, and brightened a little, though still seeming perplexed in mind at times.

Across the flat shadows we rode, into the twilight of the northern evening, and so at last to our camp by the menhir.

A gloomy glen, dense with stunted pines and littered with fallen rock and ferns, it was the very place for an ambush; and there on the greensward in the ghostly shadow of the old altar-stone, a dim little trickle of water on one hand, and the firs almost meeting overhead, we bivouacked for the night.

All helped in the frugal preparations. While I with some others gathered firewood, others again built a turf-table by way of dais after their habit, covering it with a wide saddle-cloth where the three of us were to sit at meat. Down came darkness, and up got the moon, bringing the shadow of that ancient menhir right athwart our supping-place. Fires flickered, and in the ruddy glow all presently lay about to eat; I by the princess at the table, and her brother at her feet.

Think how my heart beat now that the time was come! Think how I peered secretly into the black wall of darkness all about, seeing a glint of Roman

armour in every wandering strand of moonlight, hearing a Roman footfall every time a deer moved on the corrie or a mountain-fox set a stone strolling from above. How had my messenger fared? Was Aulus there? For aught I knew he might be at arm's-length even while we ate, and any moment plunge that strange banquet-hall into the bloody arena that would mean life or death to me. Yet minute by minute slipped by and nothing showed.

At last, to end it—for the suspense was growing intolerable—when the meal was over I unslung a little bugle-horn I carried and asked the princess whether she would care to hear some of our hunting-calls and military notes; and she, half in angry pity and half-sardonic, as she had been all the evening, nodded her assent.

So first I played them a gentle flourish, and then such notes as we call our legionaries to muster with. Still nothing moved. Next I sounded the 'make ready,' whereat an owl laughed hideously somewhere back in the shadows of that haunted valley. Jove! what a sluggard Aulus was! Would he never show? Then in desperation I set the bugle to my lips once more, and blew a charge—a wild, tumultuous war-note that every Roman from here to hot Sycice could understand; then waited with bated breath till, one by one, those fateful echoes dropped listlessly away into the distant hills.

'A stirring sound!' said the daughter of Galgacus icily; 'but it seems to me it lacks a meet response. Try again, centurion.'

So again I tried, and again naught but echoes.

'There is no answer!' said the princess.

‘No, madam. Sometimes there is, but none, it seems, to-night.’

‘No!’ she cried in a voice that filled all the glen like the cry of an angry banshee, and bounding at the same time to her feet—‘no! And will you learn why there is none? Look, ambassador! Look, peaceful messenger! Look, suppliant for our courtesy and hospitality!’ And, snatching off the saddle-cloth that had covered the turf-table, there in a hollow right at my knees, in touch all the time I had eaten, was a blackened, grinning head, staring and horrible, with something white set crossways in the foamy teeth!

Another look, and I knew it. It was the head of my messenger; and that bloody wisp of parchment between its lips, the letter I had written to Aulus! Then I understood. They had watched my pedlar ride away from last night’s camp, and sent after him. They had killed him, then found his message. It was his slayers who had joined our train that afternoon, with their grim trophy hidden beneath a cloak; and this was Iyvinda’s answer.

I scowled for a minute at that bloody thing glaring at me in such accursed fashion; and then, knowing the game was up, and disdaining to ask for favour, drew sword, flung scabbard to earth, set back against the old graven stone, and shouted:

‘Come on! come on, you jackals, you skulkers in woods and forests! If all your trees were men, and every leaf a sword, I would not ask for mercy.’

And at me they came without more to-do: Iyvinda’s brother first; but he, tripping on a root, fell harmless at my feet. Then next a hairy savage, who got the



Then another, bounding across his body, had my fist sheer
in his face.

Roman steel between neck and shoulder, and went screaming down. Then another, bounding across his body, had my fist sheer in his face, and sprawling back, fell through the nearest fire, which roared about him and rose in a monstrous column of sparks tree-high. He whom they called Ugnar, he who had killed the pedlar, next lay kicked and howling athwart the litter of the table, grappling in his agony the senseless head of the very man he had killed that morning. Another and another went down. But what was one man against so many? For a time I kept those howling wolves at bay, and then one lean villain got behind me. I dimly remember something heavy and chill dropping, it seemed, from the starlit heaven itself upon my head. Pines reeled, fires blazed and danced to sky, ten thousand swords glittered before my reeling eyes, and then I in turn went headlong down.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE feeling of unreality lay on me when I awoke after the events set down in the last chapter. Was I in the abodes of the blessed? As the first dim recollections of the fight and its ending came to my mind, that seemed the most reasonable conclusion; yet somehow I had an instinctive feeling I still lived.

Then, as consciousness slowly broadened and my eyes opened to the realities about me, the materialness

of my surroundings became more and more certain. I was lying on a couch in a roomy chamber, with peaked roof overhead and walls of roughly squared logs on both sides, while by a fire on a stone hearth in the centre an old crone sat, humming to herself as she cooked something in an earthen pot. Presently entered another person whose arrival filled me with delight even before I recognised her.

‘How fares our guest?’ asked the new-comer. ‘Still asleep?’

‘Ay,’ answered the crone; ‘but mending fast, and wakes to-night, I think.’ Whereon she shuffled out of the room on some errand.

Then Iyvinda—for of course it was she—came over to where I lay, apparently still deep in a state of trance, and looked down at me steadfastly for a moment. Assuring herself no one was watching, she bent and kissed me on the forehead.

It was a gracious kiss; and, as if at the touch of a magician’s wand, all my senses sprang into life on the instant. Turning delightedly, I opened my eyes. Thereon the Pictish girl started back, flushing redly to her hair, and stared at me half in shame and half in anger.

‘It seems, stranger,’ she said haughtily, ‘the gods have appointed you ever to set ambushes for me. How long have you been awake?’

‘But this moment, lady, and would sleep ten thousand times to be so roused again.’

‘Enough,’ she cried, waving her hand impatiently, though the tell-tale flush still showed on her cheeks; ‘it was a mistake, the foolishness of a moment, already repented of. How fares your wound?’

‘Oh, mending rapidly, as far as brief consciousness permits me to judge; and that calls to mind a tussle I had last night, in which your ladyship was mixed. I could have sworn I had the worst of it, and looked just now to wake in Elysium; the which I did, though not exactly as I had planned.’

‘It was not last night, Flavius,’ said the princess, seating herself at the foot of my couch. ‘That fight was many nights ago.’ Forthwith she proceeded to tell how, at the nick of time, she had saved me in the forest brawl, had brought me on here to her father’s city by the river Tay, and nursed and tended me back into consciousness. It was a gracious deed; and I thanked her meetly before she presently went away, and I thanked her again when she came the next morning; and, what between gratitude and that gentle lady’s presence, I mended so fast that in a day or two I was near myself again.

Many long talks I had with the princess in the porch of my chamber, the passers-by of the busy Pictish town eying us not too favourably the while. Of her I learnt more than was known in all our empire of this weird Caledonia of hers; and she of me of Tiber, and temples, and a thousand marvels that made those keen, blue northern eyes open wide with wonder. So we spent the days, forgetting time and place in the deepening delight of each other’s company, until one evening she came in haste to where I sat looking out on the wide marsh-lands about the beautiful island-city of Inchtuthill, and taking my hand, as was her friendly habit, said:

‘Great news, and bad for us, my Roman! Firstly, your all-devouring legions two days since stormed

our town of Bertha; and our routed clansmen, pouring hither, clamour to appease the gods by making a sacrifice of you. Secondly, our chiefs are sending me and my brother in hot haste to ask help from the friendly Catti across the sea. I dare not refuse to go, and dare not leave you here alone. There is but one thing for it. You can ride, I think?’

‘I have been in the saddle since I first got from my mother’s knee.’

‘Good! There is a horse new come into camp that must be your ransom; a glorious beast, taken from your friends in a foray yesterday. They sell him, saddle and all, in the market-place in half-an-hour. Bid for him yourself. Pay no heed to black looks; ask leave to ride round the market-square. Once in saddle, Flavius, may the Great Unknown who rules our comings and goings be your helper!’—this with a strange little break in her voice. ‘The near wicket-gate in the ramparts will be wide open, and the road beyond clear to the river and your comrades. ’Tis the best I can do.’

‘And you, lady?’ I said, taking her hand.

‘Oh, I shall watch that huckstering, and be at hand if the worst should betide you, as I was once before.’

‘Ay; but I meant afterwards. I would rather stay and face all your friends than think that here we part for ever.’

‘Not for ever, perhaps, my Roman,’ she answered. ‘Not unless you wish it so. But go now you *must*, and we will trust the future to kind chance. Oh, may fortune be with you, and the white-winged flame of heaven in your horse’s feet!’ Wrenching herself

from me before I could protest, she went swiftly from the room, and disappeared amongst the sullen townspeople without.

In full war-gear, I was in the market-square of the fort in half-an-hour to see that horse sold. A beautiful steed indeed, full of courage and fire, though all ungroomed; and when he saw me the poor beast recognised my trappings, and angrily shaking himself free of his Pictish groom, came bounding over with a whinny of pleasure, thrusting his velvet muzzle into my hand, and asking with great, soft eyes to be taken from the strangers back to his master. Alas, poor beast! there was dry, black man-blood caked upon his mane, and a gash of spur-rowel all across the Roman saddle, such as an armed heel would make in falling, and well I guessed what those things meant. They hardened my heart; and turning to him who had the selling of the animal, I asked:

‘Will you give me this horse, Mr Huckster, out of friendliness?’

‘No,’ answered the man sulkily.

‘Will you sell him, hoof and harness, at your own price?’

‘No,’ again said the fellow, looking round for support to the scowling faces about him.

‘Then,’ said I, putting toe in stirrup and jumping into the saddle, ‘by the Temple of Vesta and the pool where the Twin Brethren washed their steeds, I will borrow him, good fellow, till we meet again.’

Giving the reins a shake, I swung the great war-horse round towards the gateway in the ramparts which Iyvinda had said should be open, and charged right through the screaming crowd. The die was now

cast, and horse and rider knew it. Down the cobbled market-place we flashed; green grass whirled away under foot, and high rose the ramparts. The wicket loomed ahead, and when we came to it—all the town buzzing behind like a nest of angry hornets, and mounted men galloping down on every side—it was barred and silent! Some one had played Iyvinda false; but there was no time to think of that now. There was nothing for it but to ride the ramparts themselves, and the gallant beast seemed to know as well as I did what was needed. He scrambled with me up the green grass slope to the gangway, and thence again with a leap to the narrow top. Beyond was a drop of eight feet, and then a little sandy cliff of as much again, ending in a gravel-shoot leading steep down into the coppices and valley below. Up reared the horse, a fine sight against the clear light for all Pict-folk to see; and turning in the saddle, I shook my fist against the yelling mob behind, then clapped heels to flanks, and rode the willing charger right out into the sunshine!

'Twas less heroic than it looked. We lit safely, in a whirlwind of dust, and then galloped down to the marsh-road, arrows and sling-stones singing through the bushes as we fled. The Picts chased us across the moor, but as well might jackdaws chevy a homing peregrine; and when the river was reached we swam it into safety in face of the tribesmen reined up in a sullen line on the northern bank.

'Ay, a good fellow he was in his way,' Aulus Atticus was saying as he toyed with his goblet at supper that night; 'conceited, arrogant, vain of his handsome person as the worst fop amongst us, yet

bold in danger, quick in decision, resolute and brave, fearing neither men nor devils. Our master could have spared many a good soldier more conveniently than poor Flavius.'

'Is there no hope he has escaped?' asked another in the tent.

'None,' said the Master of the Horse. "'Tis said he was roasted alive beside the menhir in the country of the Horestii two nights after he left us.'

'By Castor and Pollux! I would not have been his cooks, unless he was taken sleeping,' quoth another. 'All his things are to be sold to-morrow for the benefit of his soldiers.'

'And if prices are good,' laughed a centurion lounging a little way off, 'the sum will suffice the company to get its beards trimmed next feast-day: one linen shirt much rent, a cooking-pot without a handle, a mouse-trap, a bundle of love-letters, and sundry pomatum-jars, mostly empty. Surely our jolly comrade's fortune lodged in his scabbard.'

'And where else,' I said, striding in from the night outside—'where else should a soldier's fortune dwell?' For a minute they stared incredulously; then, as my personality dawned upon them, down went beakers and up rose a joyous shout of greeting, and those good fellows, rushing round, welcomed me back to safety in royal fashion.

Thereafter succeeded a period of quiet. Our great legate Agricola was too far from rescue, if aught went wrong, to take any risks; so he moved slowly, consolidating each step of conquest before he made another. But about the end of the first week orders came from him that I was to take a hundred horse-

men at once, to cross the river by the ferry, and thence, riding eastward along the coast for a day or two, glean tidings if possible of that help which we knew was coming to the Caledonians from overseas. Above all was I to obtain news of 'the dangerous princess, the firebrand of the border,' for whose body, alive or dead, Agricola again offered a splendid reward.

The weather was bad just then; but joyfully I welcomed the chance to be in saddle once more; and as for that sweet firebrand, I could but pray the gods might send her across my path again. Very strangely they answered my prayer.

CHAPTER III.

 DAY after day we floundered along on the errand set us, between the heather and the slob, straining our eyes seaward for the expected foemen, our tempers getting sourer and more sour. All day my scanty hundred rode their reeking beasts over hills covered in mist and down into valleys where the streams chattered dismally between the rocks, the gray sea for ever on our right, the salt air coating our brass with green mildew, our swords rusting in their scabbards, and our plumes sagging like our spirits.

No man crossed our path in that forsaken region, and naught happened until one night, when the weather had somewhat mended, we were sitting round

a fire we had built up with pine-bark, our horses tethered amongst the birch-trees, the men all drawn in close to the main blaze, and young Caius Lycius stood up to sing to us. The most comely boy I think he was on this side of Propontis, and little did he know as he strutted out into the blaze of the fate which was lurking for him in the shadow of the birches! First he sang us a lampoon made by himself in saddle yesterday on the General's wife back in our camp. It was witty, and, Heaven knows, indecorous enough in part; but it made those gruff legionaries about me roll with laughter, and though rank treason in my presence, yet perforce I forgave it for their sakes. Then that stripling, after a caper or two, changed his mood, and throwing down his forehead-band that his curls might hang the looser, cast about his shoulders a blue robe he had stolen the day before from a deserted village, and masqueraded as an injured damsel pleading with her soldier-lover. We knew that piece. It was done by a great poet in drunken mood, and, as far as I know, perished for ever that night with Caius. But never to this day can I think of those passionate lines, that liquid stream of glowing love bursting from the woman in the narrative and melting even the adamant of the false soldier, without a thrill. In the end the poet has made the soldier waver, half-relent, and then, in a moment of returning fury, strike the girl senseless to his feet. And there was Caius, a born actor, as beautiful as Lysbie herself, his long hair adrift, his eyes aflash, his cheeks now hot, now cold, as the love-verse rose or sank, pouring out that fervid epic against the black curtain of the night, the while the rain-

drops hissed into the fire, and the distant British wolves howled the white stars down, one by one, to bed.

There was not a man amongst us that night who did not look back into his soul with reproach, and Caius worked upon us until at last, as the end came, we were strung to the highest pitch. Then a strange thing happened. The actor had just made a last impassioned appeal, and was standing, hands clasped and raised in supplication, a vivid cameo in his blue gown against the black setting of the night, when something flitted across our little arena, and the boy, exactly as his part prescribed, threw up his arms, and with a bitter cry fell headlong to the ground. With a roar of delighted applause the Roman soldiers acclaimed the consummate actor. Again and again they cheered and laughed; yet, his part done, he still lay face down upon the turf. How still he lay, and unmindful of our praise! We rushed and turned him over. He was as limp as a dead flower; and his face! Oh, horrible! all the beauty of a minute before was now crushed into a shapeless mass of blood and brains and hair, deep amongst which was embedded a Pictish sling-stone of half a pound in weight.

Poor Caius! a hundred swords leaped from their scabbards to avenge you; a hundred eager men sprang into the gloom of the birches; but of what avail? As well might one have chased the shadows thrown by the fire itself as the lurking enemy who had cast that cruel shot. One vowed he had seen a black form slip from tree to tree, and another had heard an elfin laugh on the rising ground beyond the stream; but the swords came bloodless home.

All night we sat, chins on knees, around the singer,

hearing the echo of his song in the sighing of the wind and the wailing of the mountain streams ; and in the gray morning we buried him where he had sung, and went on our way more silently than we had done for many marches.

We passed at noon round a deep sandy bay with a creek at the bottom, and a knoll we had marked as our northern turning-point ; and seeing nothing from there but an interminable coast beyond and Germanic brine creeping ever away eastward into the shadow of the fog-banks, we set our faces southward once more with the heartiest goodwill.

By nightfall we were back round the bay anew to a point near to where Caius fell, but closer to the sea ; and there we set camp again amongst the sand-dunes, with a stream of brackish water at our feet to help our scanty supper, and the crying of curlews by way of orchestra to send the meal down merrily.

We had been set there for about a couple of hours, when, as I came back from a bath in the stream, my brass helmet full of little crabs caught for the cooking-pot, judge of my amazement to see sitting by my fire, and solemnly turning the embers with his spear-point, a Pict in his wolf-skins ! Down went helmet and out jumped sword in a second. Surely we were betrayed, and the enemy amongst us. But no, that hide-bound gentleman was all alone ; he had passed through my sentinels in the ghostly way these hill-folk have, and now, rising to his feet, drew the back of his hand across his mouth ; by which sign I knew him at once to be one of our Pictish spies, one of those mean rogues who were ever ready to sell their kinsmen's cause for a miserable handful of silver.

That same night the fleet from overseas was coming, and we had chanced upon its very landing-place. Think, after all that weary tramping to and fro, how my heart beat at the thought of onset and blows! The news spread like wildfire amongst the men; our very chargers forgot their weariness. My plans were soon made. While two legionaries on the best horses went back to tell our distant comrades and the General, six others by my orders hastily set the dry heather in piles about a square of several acres, so that when they were fired it might seem in the night as though a Roman host lay there encamped. Lastly, with the rest I went down near to the creek in the bay, meaning more to watch than with any real hope of keeping the foreign aids from landing. Little did I guess what the night had in store for me.

We had lain out there between the heather and the sea for an hour or two, the night had darkened, and a silver moon got up, against the shine of which our Pictish spy was squatting on the summit of a mound like a toad-stone, when presently that keen-eyed rascal beckoned me towards him and pointed out to seaward. There across the white moon-path, and away into the black fields on both sides of it, were many ships coming inshore. Closer and closer they drew till all were in the bay and apparently heading for the creek. In face of such a force I began to think it was time to go.

Yet I was loath to turn, for my Tuscans were more hungry for knocks than ever they had been for meat or meal. Against all that fleet we could do nothing, yet surely the gods would send us a waifling from the host, just some little for our

hunger from among so many; and as I stood there knee-deep amongst the grass, all my eager fellows crouching silent behind me, I lifted my bare hands wide to the silver-chequered sky and vowed from my heart an altar of stone to the war-god if he would befriend us.

I prayed and I looked, and lo! the armada was stayed, and one ship alone came swiftly in toward us. Never was prayer more promptly answered, and a grim sigh of pleasure rippled through the ranks behind me.

The main fleet kept about a mile from shore, as though waiting for some signal from friends on land whom our patrolling had scattered, mayhap. They rode there like dead, black leaves on the path of the moonlight, a red spark glimmering now and again amongst them as we caught a glint of a galley-fire; or ever and anon a flash of steel, whiter even than the night-shine, twinkled down a vessel's side as the light played on ranged bucklers or sheaves of spear-heads.

Meanwhile that single vessel we watched came swiftly on. She put up a clamorous flock of sea-fowl from a bare sandbank; she crept into the creek-mouth, and we distinctly heard the Danish captain call for her brown square sail to be lowered, and then the rattle of ropes in blocks. They made fast where doubtless some had often landed before, and very soon a score or so of men and small mountain-horses had come over the lowered gangway and were making across the grass two hundred yards away for a knoll whence they could see all round the country.

Silently I gave the signal to mount; silently my brave fellows slipped into their saddles; and then, whirling out my sword, 'Rome!' I cried, and all my hundred yelled, 'Rome and Vesta!' and away we went at them. Those gentle voyagers must have deemed we had leaped straight out of the ground, so sudden was the onset; but they had little time for thinking of any kind. In a minute we were on them. Then it was *thump, thump*, and *clash, clash*, as the heavy Roman sword lit on bull-hide and brass; the shouting of fighters was heard, and the shrill cry of pain from wounded men or horses. I myself put two barbarians down; then wheeling round, singled out another limber rogue who was making off inland. He was well mounted, and took me farther than I meant, over a hillock into a grassy dell out of sight of the main fight; and then, just where some boggy ground checked him for a moment, I came up with that midnight rider. Down went horse and man under my shock, and down I jumped to slay, with heart on fire. But the ground was bog and slime, and before I could steady myself that mountain-cat had disentangled himself from the stirrups, scrambled to his feet with extraordinary agility, and would have got off had I not gripped him by his wolf-skins. We staggered and plunged in the sloppy mire, reeling and tumbling, until at last we were prone amongst the hummocks, rolling over and over in the death-grapple. It was fierce but brief. The shallow strength of that fellow—surely he could have been but a boy—was quickly spent. For a minute I lay so, hearing his half-stifled sighs. Then—for we gave no quarter in those good old days—I took sword by

a short grip, bared the pulsing white throat under me, and in another minute would have struck.

But in baring his neck I loosed the fur hood he had worn, and thereon, from under it, burst out a loose mass of long hair, red as the blood that was to have run; and from between the hair, as my enemy turned with one convulsive struggle, shone out a face in the moonlight—a sweet white face, with frightened eyes staring into mine! Jove! was I mad? Was it—could it be? Yes, by all the powers! there was but one such face in all the world.

‘Iyvinda,’ I cried, relaxing my hold; ‘you here, and like this!’

‘And you, Flavius!’ cried that lady as she struggled from my grip.

Never shall I forget the scene. We twain, panting, besmeared, and spattered; the night wind waving gray grass upon the hillocks, the last shouts of the fight dying away in the distance, the stars twinkling overhead, and red fires of the false camp on the black hillside now blazing up finely.

The lady spoke first, and it was feminine. ‘What do you mean,’ she said fiercely, ‘by pulling my hair down?’

‘As I live, madam, I did not know there was so much to loosen.’

Whereon she frowned, and set to work to braid her locks anew.

Presently she spoke again. ‘I suppose I am a prisoner, Roman?’

‘Yes,’ I had to answer, though the word stuck in my throat.

Then again she asked in a lower voice, 'Can I buy my freedom? I am rich in many ways.'

It was quiet enough now; the sky was velvet over us; a small, fine scent was coming from the sand-convolvulus, and she was wonderfully beautiful as she sat there, the flush of recent exertion on her face, and the night-fire running down the loose strands of her hair like liquid flame. What a girl to crucify or send to Rome! Yet how could I choose? No; she must take her chance, as many a better before her had done. Yet—and yet the infatuation of her presence and the love I already felt rose strong within me; meanwhile duty was ranked upon the other side. So I could but hide my indecision behind an anger I did not feel, and jumping up, I slammed sword into scabbard.

'Yes,' I said, 'a prisoner, trapped by night like a wild-cat, and about as likely to have ransom.'

Thereat the lady sighed; but whether she would have argued it or no I cannot say, for ere we could speak again the moon twinkled on the arms of a dozen of my fellows, red sword in hand, riding over the hummocks to see what had become of their captain.

Then came quickly over to me the princess and whispered in my ear:

'This at least may I ask of one who perhaps owes me some little gratitude: that for the time I may be to others that man my clothes bespeak me. These good fellows of yours, centurion, are apt to be rough travelling companions for a maid far from her friends.'

That at least I could grant. Indeed, my jealousy

had prompted the thought already; so hair was swept back, belt tightened, hood drawn over face again, and by the time the soldiers came on us there was I with my captive chief as plausible as could be.

Back we went to the fighting-place, to find there the ship already gutted by the men, while my sham camp behind was showing up very prettily on the far hillside; and the Danish fleet, taking for granted the lights ashore and noise of fighting meant a powerful Roman force awaiting them, was putting to sea again in excellent haste. Seeing all had turned out so well, and feeling there was no chance of more usefulness so far from home, I called in all straying men by bugle-blast, and ordered a two hours' rest; after which, as soon as daylight should come, the quickest way with our news to camp. My captive I gave into the charge of a gruff old Thracian veteran who was body-servant to me, bidding him secure the 'boy' near to my fire, and then went out to post some sentries on the hills. I was away an hour or two on that business or watching the Danish fleet safely into the distance, and coming back, found all my tired men asleep by their fires. The eagle was planted in the sand by my own embers—for we had no tents with us—and close by were two lying asleep, who turned out to be the Thracian and the Pict. The veteran, seeing nothing substantial to tie her to in the neighbourhood save ling or cotton-grass, had made her ankle fast to his own; and there they slept, the soldier little wotting what a sweet bedfellow he had, and the weary princess, worn with voyage and excitement, in placid dreams beside him.

It moved my jealousy, yet I forbore to disturb them, for no better anchorage could have been found for a restive captive than that gaunt old warrior; and going a little way off, I threw myself down and slept in turn.

The great black sea was all on fire with sunrise when I woke again, and the camp already busy, while from the watercourse behind a mound came an uproarious sound of laughter and voices calling out :

‘Take his pelt off.’

‘Throw him in just as he stands, Titus.’

‘Chuck him to us, old Thracian, and we’ll soon rinse the Pict out of him. We’ll make him the cleanest savage that ever slept on cowhide.’

In general I left the men to their sports unhindered ; but something misgave me at that moment. Where was the princess ? What were they doing ? I rushed to the top of the rise, and there saw in the brackish pool below a dozen soldiers up to their chests in the water. On the bank was my burly henchman, scolding and expostulating ; and, finally, in a burst of virtuous anger, he was about to tear the wolf-skins from a shrinking figure there was no mistaking. Cursing my stupidity, I fled down the slope and rushed between them.

‘What’s this ?’ I cried. ‘I told you to keep the prisoner safe, not to duck him.’

‘But, sir,’ answered the Thracian, ‘this beastly Pict of yours won’t wash. ’Tis a fine morning, and as there is a long march before us, I told him a dip would do him good, and brought him here squealing and fighting like a rat in a trap ; but he clings to his furs as though he had grown to them.’

‘Perhaps,’ I answered grimly, ‘he has some good reason. Let him be, Titus, and get into your green slime-puddle yourself. Come on, Pict; if you cannot wash, maybe you can cook, and breakfast will be much to the point just now.’

A little later we set off southward to join the main force, the men joyous at thought of seeing their comrades, and I happy enough in a soldier’s duty done, with maybe a chance of promotion to follow, yet deeply in love, and perplexed as to that sweet captive we bore along with us.

Now that the rush and turmoil was over, that prize of mine loomed overwhelming on my mental vision. For what had I enslaved her? To what fate was she going? I knew only too well those iron-souled men back yonder would have no pity. Their kindest charity would be the flaming stake or that horrible crucifix they were so fond of, and the long, withering pain on some hill-top from dawn to sunset: an example, they would call it, to those who urged resistance to Imperial Rome. And could I be her lauded captor through the camps? Could I endure, with her price in my hands, to stand by and see that white flesh cringe as the tendrils of the fire lapped about it, or those brave eyes dim as they stared in the monotony of that other death into the shadows of her native hills? That was the kindest those men could do. Or, if they elected to send her to Rome, degraded, alone; passing from hand to hand amongst the rough soldiery, and from tent-door to tent-door of dissolute consuls and prætors till the long journey brought her at last to the place where her fate was certain. Could I bear to think of her

like that—I, to whom she had been so generous, who had taken blood-money for her? Yet to set her free would be rank treason. By all the infernal deities, it seemed to me I was bound to be a traitor whichever way it happened! All that first march my chin hung so low on my chest that presently my fellows began to notice me. A lieutenant in our troop, one Longinus, a Lusitanian, presently rode alongside and asked:

‘What is it, Flavius, sits so heavy on you? No secret hurt, I hope, taken in last night’s tussle. If it is a splinter under your cuirass or a broken arrow-point that rankles, out with it, sir. There are fellows here who have learnt enough leech-craft in the bloody lecture-halls of war to mend worse hurts than that.’

‘No, no, Longinus. I am sound above and below, and, the gods know, had a lighter bout last night than most of you.’

‘Then maybe it is the crabs this morning. I trust there were no green ones in your pottinger.’

‘Again no, Longinus. I tell you I am sane and sound, and only thinking what I will do if the army vote me to the purple for last night’s work. There, ride on again, like a good fellow, and about sundown watch for a safe camping-place: grass, water, a clear view, and room to swing swords if need be. You know how the Roman sleeps as well as I.’ And the Lusitanian, shrugging his shoulders at my moodiness, perforce turned and rode away.

There was nothing more of adventure during the day except that, crossing round the breast of a hill near to where the salt sea narrows in to the estuary

of the Tay, we came into sight of the whole of our fleet—the white numerals on their sails distinguishing them clearly from all other galleys—bound northward. By their direction we guessed, though too far for signalling, our friends had heard of the fight and were in search of the enemy's ships. They were but black dots on a shimmering golden field; yet somehow, as I reined in my charger on the Pictish heather, a prophetic pride swelled in my heart, and I said to myself that yonder blue plain was the true Road of the Masters. To own that road is, and must be, to own the world. Would we had taken to it earlier! Had Rome been founded where Venice stands, and our beloved eagle born web-footed, what might she not have done!

The next morning rose ruddy and golden in the east, and we were early astir, since one march, all knew, should take us into sight of camp; and though it was but a few days we had been away, we already felt like exiles returning, and thirsted desperately for sight of comrades. Consequently there was not one who was not cheerful; none save the prisoner and I, her captor. She took her bread and water, standing a little aloof from us; and then, when the time came, patiently mounted astride of the hill-pony we had allotted her, and suffered the Thracian, who was her tether-peg by night and surly guardian by day, to fasten her ankles lightly together under the beast's belly, so that she could by no means descend without help. But of tears or protests she had none, and just endured.

That somehow made me fret the more; and, while my heart kindled over her with constantly increasing

warmth, I could in nowise see a way out of the dilemma into which fate had thrust me, or get help from any expression of hers as to solving it.

Yet I need not have chafed so much. Though women have been made weak of execution, they have often been fertile of design. There was shrewd conjecture in those glances which I saw, without understanding, the girl shoot at my troubled face now and then as we rode along. Under that wolf-skin hood a nimble brain was at work on an idea the consummation of which even now makes me frown and laugh as remembrance of my own stupidity, or of that dear lady's simple cunning, rises for the moment dominant in my mind.

Therefore you will please imagine us pacing, three abreast, southward through the hot autumn day, a thin line of Roman gray and scarlet: I and Iyvinda and Longinus, with a few others, in front; behind, the Tungrian cohort; and behind again, a score of dark-clad British mercenaries from the south, hating and hated of their northern countrymen; the sea not far off upon our left, the purple heather under hoof, and the circling pewits overhead; a glint of keen white water in the west, and now and then a snatch of Tuscan love-song or a timely jest rippling down our ranks. But never a sight of home or homestead, kine or keepers, in all that wilderness.

Yet the day was not quite without adventure. We had ridden the sun right round from left to right, and were going a little carelessly down a narrow gully having steep, rocky banks on each side, covered with fern and birches up to the thicker woods atop. There was a brook below, and a green

way on one bank, six feet wide, kept as smooth as velvet by rabbits, and along this we were pacing, full only of thoughts of the evening meal and the rejoicing to-morrow, when—and I tell it not more briefly than it happened—a figure started up on top of a pinnacle of rocks above our heads and blew a blast upon a cow-horn trumpet such as the natives use to call to battle. Instantly the whole glen became peopled, as far down as we could see, with armed Caledonians. They rose all along the sky-line like mushrooms that grow in a night; they cropped up in bunches amongst the rocks; they rose from the dense cover of the ferns like some quaint growth of a disordered dream; they stood amongst the birches in knots; and, as they rose, every man silently lifted a bow and drew a long arrow up to the head against us! There must have been nearly a thousand on foot within the time it has taken you to read this—enough arrows to have transfixed my poor handful at the first discharge; while against me, as the conspicuous leader, sufficient shafts were turned at that moment to have set me thicker, had they been let loose, than ever was porcupine with quills.

I gave a gasp and rubbed my eyes to make sure it was not some ugly dream. I could almost have laughed, it was all so sudden; but it was no laughing matter! To turn back was not to be thought of; to ride forward was to court a wintry rain of shafts from which not one man in twenty would escape; to charge up either slope was to have the same arrows before and behind, so narrow was the pass. I glanced back over the halting column. The British were huddled together and already tremulous with the

throes of disaster ; the Roman veterans, though they had been jerked suddenly from their merry choruses into the presence of ugly death, were unmoved. Not a man blanched ; all their hands were on their hilts, and all their faces set towards me, while they waited orders as stolidly as though I were but a drill-master teaching them goose-step in a prætorian barrack-yard.

There was nothing for it, I thought to myself in swift decision, but ‘ All to foot ; Tungrians, cross the stream and charge to right ; you, Picus, with your dozen Gauls and as many British as have pluck to follow, storm the nearer slope.’ To hesitate was to die as we sat in saddle ; and snatching a bugle from the man nearest to me, I prepared to sound the charge. But just as I put the brass to my lips the princess, who had calmly set herself between me and the most threatening of the enemy, laid a quiet hand on mine and said, ‘ Stop, Roman ! I think I can play better music here than you can,’ and without more to-do, slipped her hand into her vest and brought out a whistle made of an eagle’s wing-bone cunningly inlaid with gold from her native hills. She put it to her lips, just as the figure on the rock raised his to sound an onset, and blew so wild and shrill that the linnets stopped feeding on the brambles. Then she blew again in another key, and a quiver of astonishment seemed to pass over the ranks of the tribesmen. She blew again, and all the taut bow-strings, that had been glistening up and down the glen like dry bents on a hillside in August, were relaxed. With a sound like the wind in the pine-trees came the murmur of her name. Never a word she said, though I saw her blue eyes flash with pride

and mastery. She waved her hand, and down the bowmen sank : the rocks drank them up ; they melted into the greenery of the bracken ; they were no longer amongst the birch-trees ; the shadows of the pines were vacant. As my princess finished, I glared in amazement up and down a glen that was as silent and unpeopled as though no human feet but ours had trod it since the making of the world.

The rest of the day was all plain marching, and at nightfall Longinus chose us a heathery spur for camping-place, with a torrent on one side and a few pines and birches atop, amidst which my place was made and my charger stalled. Fires we made none that night, for we were in the enemy's country, and being so high, durst not kindle blazes which would attract their attention. We ate our black bread and the remains of what we had saved from the morning in little groups, the moon when it arose filling the place with shadows, and the voices of the forests around stirring our southern imaginations with vague, mysterious terrors.

My princess ate her share of dry soldier-fare by my side almost in silence. I had kept her close by me through the march, nominally using my captive as a guide ; but in reality I was partly jealous of other companionship for her, and partly fearful lest she should escape. She was by me all day, and by me when the sun went down ; and it was so pleasant to be with her that all my soldier duties and ambitions, my fears and hopes, seemed slipping away into a distance of infinite insignificance compared to her sweet presence. They had tethered the princess to a log by one ankle, like a mountain-goat ; and when

our black bread was done, and the last draught of water in the pitcher drunk out, I went and sat down by the prisoner, yet even then had but little to say.

She eyed me out of the corner of her quick feminine eyes as she had done once or twice before during the day, and her expression was not angry. Then presently she drew closer with a little frightened shudder, and raising a finger, asked :

‘Didst hear that, Flavius?’

‘Hear it, lady? Why, it would have turned the cold heart of one long dead,’ I answered as the echoes of a dismal cry from some evil fowl of those haunted woodlands drifted away.

‘And you know what it means?’

‘Not I, unless it is a bittern calling to its mate in the swamp below.’

‘It was no bittern, Roman. I heard it last night as well. The soul of my fathers was behind that cry, and they call me to come to them.’

How can I express the infinite pathos of those words? They were plain enough in themselves, yet, coming on all I had thought that day and in the silence of the evening, they fell on my heart like lead.

I rose to my feet and paced to and fro before the downcast girl, more agitated now than ever before, until in a minute or two my resolve was taken; and stopping before her, I took her hands in mine, and lifting her to her feet, exclaimed :

‘Iyvinda! we Romans are brief in many things, and briefest of all in emergencies. Now, here is an emergency between us two for certain. If I take you back to-morrow to yonder camp, no influence I

have—not even your good deed to us to-day—will save you from a fate which will be certain and horrible. If, again, I set you free of my own will, I am false to my General, false to my comrades, false to my country, whose enemies you inspire. But, Iyvinda, not for comrades or country, not for my life itself, will I sell you into a foul slavery. Do you know why?’

But the fair Pict only sighed softly and answered with a faint turn of her head that shook down the ruddy curls from which she had put back her cape to hear the better.

‘Then,’ said I, ‘I will tell you. It is because you have moved me as no other woman has done before; because I, who thought never to have a home but the camp, and never a mistress but the sword at my side, have been treasuring your image in my heart since I saw you first, thinking of you by day and dreaming of you by night; because, in brief, Iyvinda, I love you.’

The princess was a woman, and very simple was the emotion with which she averted her face for a few seconds; then, turning again, she put one hand in mine, placed the other on my shoulder, and kissed me softly on the cheek. That gentle salutation was genuine, past a doubt. I had not expected it so briefly; and I, who thought myself proof against all woman-arts, in turn hung my head. Whereat the princess—with smile at my discomfiture, and under the discreet shadow of the evening—kissed me again; and it was so pleasant I must needs have another, and another afterwards, to prove the first were true samples of those to come. Then there was

no more diffidence; her head was on my shoulder, only the pale stars looking at us through the black screen of the pines, and her face shining up into mine in simple happiness. Presently she demurely released herself, and pointing to her still hobbled foot, said she could be happier with the ropes away. 'In Rome, do you always keep your ladies with one leg tied to pine-logs?' Was it likely I, a brand-new lover, could refuse? Her foot was untied and the bonds thrown aside in a moment. Then, with a sigh of relief, the chieftainess sat herself upon the tree-stem, and made me sit at her knee, leaning against the fallen pine.

It was she who spoke next. 'All this is very pleasant, Flavius, and my heart rebels to break the thread; but the night wears on, and to-morrow comes. Those red flames your good comrade Atticus prepares for me will bite quite as sharply after what has just been done as before; or do you mean to claim me as private spoil, in spite of prefects and emperor?'

'You must never get so far as the camp, lady. If I hesitated once, I hesitate no longer. For you I will gladly give up everything. I have strong friends and influence, and there are those in the empire who love to harbour such as have broken with imperial tyranny. We will slip aboard ship to-morrow, and, once across the narrow seas, start afresh. Jove! but I will wring such splendour for you from the times. You shall have marble villas and baths, and purple and silk, and slaves and unguents; and I shall be so proud of you, you and your ruddy hair; and all men shall admire and envy,

and none shall come within a spear-length but for homage.'

'Or why not,' she said when I paused—'since break you must—why not take the nearer road, and come where I can give you more lands than ever your sword can win? Come with me,' she said gently. 'Even from here the watch-fires of a town of my kindred shine in the darkness, and once with them all Rome could not hurt him whom I had chosen. And I could give you more sunny corn-fields, my centurion, than all your legions could harvest; and great woods lapping unnumbered hills with greenery 'tween here and the northern sea; and strong navies sailing oceans no Roman ever yet set eyes on—seas that flame in crimson when the sun goes down at nightfall; and henchmen, rough, but loyal as sword-hilt to hand; and damsels—blue-eyed, ruddy-haired, nimble as fawns—to sing and dance to you, for I would not be very jealous. All the summer we would lie out in the forests, hunting, seeing our fleets come and go, and taking tribute from feudatories; and all the winter we would laugh and lie abask by the blaze, drinking mead and listening to the Scalds, and plotting new ventures while the storms thundered outside. Surely these things might be pleasant.'

But as to these rival projects, I could only shake my head reflectively. In truth, I was getting very sleepy after a long day in saddle. Seeing this, my charming prisoner bent low over me and whispered, 'Well, never mind, then; to-morrow we will decide. To-night, she added, stooping so low that her hair made a tent about me, and her eyes were like soft

stars overhead, 'is it not enough to know that *I love you?*' Thereon, stroking my black Roman curls the while with a rhythmic touch, she began softly crooning over me a gently undulating, fancy-haunted Pictish love-song. Enough? What lover would say that was not more than enough? And, tired, happy, and soothed by those cadenced verses of hers—so strange, so dreamy, that presently I began to fancy the very night-breeze itself was playing orchestra to them in the sighing fir-trees—soothed by all those things, my tired eyes presently closed, and my soul slipped softly out into a deep, untroubled region of sleep.

When I awoke again it was still dark, though the dawn was coming, and I stretched my hand out for the hand of Iyvinda; but no answering touch met it. I started up, now wide awake. Iyvinda was not by me! I felt the bed they had made for her under the log, and the heather was stiff and damp with night-dew. I stared out a few yards to where they had tied by my charger the hill-pony she used, and the empty halter was hanging from the tree! I stared at the log where she had been sitting, and noticed something lying on it. This I snatched up, and in the first gray light of the dawn saw it was a spray of bog-myrtle, the symbol of love, bound round and round between the glossy foliage with a braid of red hair!

Then vexation and wrath swept in a torrent into my heart, and I knew my princess was free again.

CHAPTER IV.

HEY gave us a fine welcome when we rode into camp on the Tay somewhat late next day. The news of our exploit had gone before us as we trooped, weather-stained, through the main gateway. Seeing we had encountered the enemy by land and sea, they laughingly called us the Amphibians; and the Amphibian Cohort we are to this day.

Agricola was bathing in a bull-hide bath when I arrived, yet sent for me to his tent at once. There I found the great soldier—the bravest, keenest, and most generous of all Rome’s marshals—with a towel round his middle and another circling his head, having the news of the day repeated to him, while two negroes kneaded and rubbed him dry. Between the rubbings the all-powerful legate heard my story piecemeal, and told me I had done well. He heard of my prisoner and his escape with a shrug of his shoulders.

‘Set naught by that, Quintillus,’ he said. ‘Captive Pictish rascals will be as common in our camp in a few days as blackberries on the hedges in September. Something we might have learned from him, it is true; but I have handier means of information than that.—By the way,’ said the General to his secretary, who was standing near, ‘where is that spy who came in with news from the Island City an hour ago?’

‘He is with the guards outside, sir.’

‘Bring him in.’

Presently a cringing fellow entered. Think how my heart beat when, at the General's command, he told his tale, relating how the daughter of Galgacus had arrived unexpectedly at her father's town of Innis-na-tuathail, as the Caledonians call it, that morning, and gone straight to the council board, travel-stained as she was, to find, so the fellow said, all in disorder; that the army which should have been ready was still away harvesting in the Highland glens, and naught but jealousies thriving in the city. Well indeed could I picture the scene, and the fiery wrath of my princess. But to Agricola it was only good news, and gleefully he gave orders to march for the Pictish town on the morrow.

March we did. We pushed slowly forward up the south bank of the river until we came opposite to where that lovely island rose green and fertile out of the plain below, to which Iyvinda had conveyed the wounded. On the southern and eastern side was the big stream, and on the others stretched lagoons: altogether a fine and stately place against the backing of the purple hills beyond. I, who rode at his rein, saw the legate's lips tighten and his eyes flash with pride and soldier-covetousness as he stared hard at that natural stronghold. Then he smote his hand upon his thigh as he sat his charger, and, laughing, said, 'Here is another Athens, and I another Sylla! By the holy flame that fell from heaven! I will not touch flesh or wine until I dine in yonder citadel.'

The legate broke his wine-vessels that noon, dined on dry biscuit, and thereafter devoted himself with remorseless energy to preparations for the assault.

A ford was first found in the low river; then light horsemen—many of whom never came back—scoured the flats right up to the slopes of Inchtuthill, looking for the safest passages. While they were away incredible numbers of faggots were made to form causeways over swampy places for the attacking army, all the heavy gear and provender was stored in a roughly-made fort amongst the oak-trees, and every man was told off to his place. Then at last, when the hot day ended and the tired soldiers sank down to rest by their arms, the officers slipped from group to group, whispering in sleepy ears, ‘To-morrow at sunrise!’

But fate forestalled us! The dark night had come. The Pictish citadel stood out like a black island against the low yellow glow in the north, its battlements like fine ebony fretwork against the golden sheen. Then, down by the ford, a wakeful sentinel called out to a comrade, and he to another, until presently a murmur went through the camp that set us all on elbows, sleepily staring northward. The Island City was on fire! By fives, and tens, and twenties, little spirals of smoke went into the black air above, and presently up these wavering columns tendrils of rosy flame began to twine, at first threads in the gray, but soon increasing until they budded and broke into crimson flowers aloft that lit the country round. The town was all of wood, great solid beams from ancient forests, backed by massive walls of sun-dried turf, and it burnt like a furnace. As we watched, the first few columns of light grew into a hundred; then, down below, red fissures began to gape in the foundations, and rosy filaments like

fine roots ran here and there across the dark earth; then distant roars of falling roofs, each accompanied by fountains of embers sending a thousand new constellations into the sky, fell on our ears.

Wider and wider grew the glint. Burning buttresses and battlements began to pour down the slope just as I have once seen the Cumanian hill pour its molten gold into the sea; and overhead, like a fiery canopy that same hill wore, a wide roof of crimson clouds reflected the glow beneath, till river, lake, and swamp glittered as though the very earth were paved with gold.

We watched that strange sight until at last the light went off our faces as we talked in low tones together, the distant blaze died fitfully down, the stars came back, and we waited in wondering disappointment for the sunrise.

Now there was no need to hurry. We crossed the Tay at sunrise; and in a long, trailing line, with native scouts on either side to prevent surprise, we picked our way through the fen. It was my privilege to be one of the half-dozen who rode ahead with Agricola; and as we turned to the westward, and saw the steep slopes rise above us crowned with the smouldering remains of ramparts, and looked in vain for a road, we recognised the strength of the fine natural fortress which had fallen so easily into our hands. Riding on west and north at a gallop, we presently got between the water and the hill, and, striking a road leading from the mountains, rode up through a cleft, and there on top the master of Britain pulled rein.

‘Jove!’ he said, turning lightly to us with the flush of exertion on his face, ‘what a pleasant place! These Pictish friends of ours chose well when they set their standards here; and, please Heaven, others shall inherit from them who will appreciate no less.—Here, Flavius, I think I will set my villa, with terraces and gardens looking out to yonder hills: eastward we’ll make a temple to Mars, who has scattered our enemies; while beyond will come the ramparts of hard white stone circling a camp that shall last for ever. We’ll make it as snug an eyrie as ever the Roman eagle built, and lord it over the glens, taking toll of every caravan that goes by fell or flood.—Come on, comrades; let us see what the brave Galgacus has left for us.’

It was little enough! All the town I knew so well was a smoking ruin, with only here and there ragged walls standing above the desolation. In one part a small field of uncut corn had escaped destruction, the wild flowers in it contrasting strangely with the black of the charred oak-logs lying around, and the dazzling white of peat-ash. There were many dead horses littered about, and the crows were already collecting to feast on their roasted flesh as we picked our way across to the southern rampart. There, between the gaps, we looked down on the long trail of our army coming up after us, and over a fair, wide country of wood and meadow, of broad bending river, of lagoons and hills innumerable. Truly it was a fine property, and even the weather-beaten cheeks of our General flushed with pleasure as he looked over the splendid land our swords had won, and heard the roar of victorious salutation

which came up to him from the flashing stream of brass and steel passing below.

Then back we went, and in mid-plateau found the ruin of the many-chambered palace where Galgacus had held his court. It was better built than the rest; more was standing of it; so across the central hall Agricola had a coloured canopy spread, 'neath which he and we bivouacked amongst the ashes. It was a merry, noisy meal: kites screaming overhead, sun blazing on the ruins outside, swine and deer flesh in captured silver smoking on the half-burnt Pictish tables, and red Rhenish wine flowing like water down our dusty throats.

Meanwhile, you will bear in mind, we did not know whether the enemy had fled for good and all, or whether they but postponed the fight. While we waited several days for news of their intentions, the legate marked out a camp in the north-east corner of Inchtuthill, turning the first sod himself, and working bare-armed amongst us, as was his habit now and then. We built, swept, and shovelled, ten thousand of us, till the Inch must have looked like an ant-hill to the smiling gods above; and, helped by some rain which fell from their hands about that time, in an incredibly short space of time we converted the place into a prosperous Roman camp.

A week had passed with no tidings of the barbarians, when one night a strange thing happened. I slept soundly in the ruins of the very chamber where Iyvinda had nursed me back to life after the fight at the menhir. A little past midnight I took to tossing restlessly, and dreamed of my Pictish maid

so vividly that presently I awoke with a start, and saw for a minute, with my wide-open eyes, her face on the far wall, half-veiled in a pale-blue haze, but so true, so certain was it, that with a cry of surprise I rose; whereon the image vanished. Springing up, I lit a second lamp from the one dimly burning in a niche, and looked about, but nothing showed. Going to the door, there outside was the starlit night, and a sentinel walking stolidly to and fro before the main gate: nothing there, either, to note. So out I blew my taper. On turning into the chamber, I suddenly recoiled with a start; for, sitting on my bed, and dressed simply in woman's clothing, was Iyvinda again—herself, her very self, more dear, more beautiful than ever before—with little of the princess about her, but much of the woman. For a minute I stared in breathless astonishment, then held out my arms.

‘Iyvinda,’ I cried, ‘my soul, my life! Black have been the days when you were away!’

Rising, she turned on me a gentle, anxious face, and also held out her hands.

I touched them! I felt the cool, soft firmness of those finger-tips as certainly as I have ever felt sword or spear-shaft in battle. I got so near to that yearning face that I could see a tear shine upon it against the blackness of my room; and then the lips moved and my name crossed them, with a sigh as soft as a sleeping infant's. Striding forward, I made to enclose that charming maid, never for a moment doubting she was there in reality; but she was gone. Again I made the same futile search within and without; then I cast myself on my bed, and after

an hour of confused thinking, dozed once more. No sooner were my eyelids closed than Iyvinda was kneeling at my side, gently holding me down by mental force in sleep.

Yearningly she whispered over me, 'Flavius, my heart is heavy. Come to me, Flavius, while there is yet time and shelter offers. Come to me, my beloved, for that happens which I cannot stay. The clamour of battle is in my ears, and the cry of the dying; and I fear for you. Come to me, my best beloved, for to-morrow it may be too late.' Then, with more which I may not tell, she slowly slipped from my senses.

Between cock-crow and mustering-call next morning a spy came in to report the Caledonians were gathering for battle. In some incredible way his news was known all over the camp as soon as the General knew it; and as he came with set face from his doorway all our ten thousand men burst into one wild cheer of exultation and defiance. Agricola stared out at the Pictish hills as though he had heard nothing in that tumult; but in his heart he knew he had heard the presage of victory.

By noon the next day we were faced with the enemy for battle, and all the sound of preparation had died down to a deadly silence. Near our western cliffs a thousand Roman veterans were in reserve; and farther out, across the grassy plain, was our main battle. Yonder, where the land rose gently up by sloping foot-hills to pine-covered ridges, the Caledonians were ranged against us to the number of thirty thousand.

Aulus Atticus, his eyes blazing with delight, and

the colour coming and going on his cheeks as though it were a feast-day and he a village-girl waiting for the first dance, commanded the cavalry on the right; I at his charger's flank. So still each army lay in the plain for an hour, both hesitating to invoke the dreadful chance of battle, that the plovers settled again on the open ground between us, and now and then we could hear the Pictish babies, brought to watch their fathers fight, crying amongst the wagons on the hill-top.

At last there was a movement on the hill Grampius. Light horsemen galloped out of the masses of their kindred and taunted us; the Pictish women set up a dreadful wailing, rising and falling like the sound of the sea at night; and, even while we looked, the lowermost tiers of the Picts came slowly surging down towards us like a far-reaching black tide. Then dismay seized our mercenaries in the centre for a moment, and they begged, in face of an enemy so formidable, to have the Roman veterans sent for.

'What!' cried Agricola laughingly; 'spill blue Roman blood when a muddy tide such as fills your veins may suffice to float us to victory! No, no, my whelps; to-day is yours. Six months in camp your busy tongues have asked for such a chance as this; and, now 'tis here, show your teeth like the gallant cubs of the mother-wolf I know you are. See! I will have no vantage of the meanest of you. Thus—thus I throw in my lot with yours;' springing down as he spoke, and with a single stroke of his sword, killing the beautiful white horse he loved. 'Now let me see the coward who durst not follow

though all hell were ranked against him when Agricola leads on foot.'

Naught might stand against such argument, and, with a cheer, our battle rose and charged across the plain to meet the foemen. It was a stirring sight, with a kingdom for prize. The dust rose in a fog above the fighting men, the light ran twinkling up and down a wavering tangle of steel, and the roar of twenty thousand men at each other's throats was dreadful to listen to. With ever-increasing strength it was 'Rome! Rome and Vesta!' Ownerless chariots went flying across the plain, and wild-eyed horses dragging bloody corpses by the stirrup-irons galloped heedlessly through the sunburnt meads; wounded men staggered out and lay down to die in shady corners of the war-fog; and standards dipped and fell as to and fro the long line of battle bent and swung. But ever it was 'Rome! Rome or Hades!'

Back at last the barbarians began to go before our invincible wall of shields; and when their kindred on the hills saw that, another tier and another of their host was launched; and back in turn the struggling Latins reeled.

'Curse on them!' cried Aulus, gnawing his helmet-strap with anxiety and impatience. 'All the furies of the nether world be upon them! Are we to sit idle here all day while the fight is lost or won?'

Hardly had he spoken when a horseman galloped up from the centre. 'Word,' he said, 'from Agricola! The barbarians are coming on you from behind the northern slope. Charge them! Then round behind

our battle, and charge again where they threaten on the south. This from Agricola.'

We did not want a second bidding. Some five thousand of the enemy, hoping to outflank us, had come down, as the General saw, on our right; and joyously we went at them as they swept out, horse and footmen, into the meadows. There were three thousand of us, and after months of sword-fast we went at them as though each man were riding to his mistress's arms. We fell on with blind fury, and the crash of our meeting was heard right over to the far end of the fight. It was a wild, tumultuous chaos of dust and horsemen, a fierce drive through a tangled thicket of spears and swords, in which those who fell fought each other as they died underfoot, and dying horses kicked and bit, and an indescribable roar of mingled rage and pain went up into the sky. Then we were through, and what was left of the enemy flying for the woods.

'Now to the south, comrades,' cried Aulus, covered with blood and dust, but as handsome as the war-god himself. 'There is still another course to this feast, and I think you are as hungry as I am.'

To the south we went, wheeled into line, and again charged the tribesmen. Meanwhile our Batavian and Tungrian cohorts, finding the enemy wavering, had linked their shields and, with a rush, borne them headlong backward upon their rear ranks, who became wedged up and confused, and broke! Then it was 'Rome! Rome!' again, and back our gallant mercenaries drove the reeling clans, hacking and stabbing as they trampled down their ranks, while horrible

confusion spread up the hill, and the plain behind the victorious Romans darkened with dead.

‘Now, once more, friends,’ said Aulus—‘once more on them, and the land is ours.’ And away we went again headlong into the helpless confusion of the Northmen. Bravely they stood against us here and there, even when they saw the day was lost to them; but of what avail was it? They went down like sheaves under a mower’s sickle. We cleared the whole of the foot-hills.

Then Aulus, wheeling round to disperse a gathering still holding a knoll in the Pictish centre, sent me with a handful to see how the rout progressed in the north. When the errand was done, to my incredible surprise evening was on us! The whole day had slipped by with magic swiftness in what seemed but an hour of wild excitement. Would that my soul had sunk for ever in the happy oblivion of battle, for there is now to tell that which spoils everything, dimming the shine of victory and numbing my pen, though many months have passed since the thing happened I write of.

The evening was on us. The tired Romans were camped about the plain, and the far sky-line was flecked with red where the flying Caledonians were burning their villages. I had sent my handful to their supper, and was pacing moodily along where the fight had been thickest, when a voice called to me from amid a group of dead men:

‘Flavius the centurion!’

I reined up, and, staring hard, saw a living Pict strapped to the wheel of an overturned chariot.

‘Flavius,’ he said, ‘you know me not?’

‘Not I, you son of darkness.’

‘Yet it was I who felled you by the menhir in Horestia.’

‘And now you would have me settle that score by finishing the work some foolish, slave-taking soldier of ours has left undone.’

‘Not so. I called to you to say I will buy my freedom, if you will unbind me, with great news.’

‘Beast! keep your gossip to yourself. I would not listen to it to save a thousand such as you from the galleys.’

‘What! not if it concerned the Princess Iyvinda?’

Out jumped my sword, and in a moment the man’s lashings were cut through. ‘Speak,’ I cried; ‘you are free. What of the princess?’

‘Go to the knoll,’ answered the fellow, edging away into the darkness, ‘where we made the last stand against your horsemen. She is there.’

Iyvinda on the hillside in the gathering darkness! Oh, what did that mean? With a cry I could not control, I stirred my charger with the spurs; and away, loose-reined, he flew through the labyrinths of dead or dying men and the black-red puddles on the hillside—away to the hillock where all the bravest Picts had fallen. There, in the hush of the August twilight, I cried aloud, ‘Iyvinda;’ and from just in front of my horse-hoofs a voice answered gently, ‘My Flavius!’

I was down in an instant and kneeling by her, and all my heart turned to water, for I saw she was wounded and dying.

‘I am glad you have come,’ she said quietly as I propped her against my knee. ‘We made our stand

here, but none may hold against the Roman. They came at us like ravening wolves. Oh, how weak I get! Yonder big man who was leading—who is he?’

I looked where she pointed, and saw a figure, already stiff in death, staring coldly up at the coming stars, and cried in horrified astonishment, ‘Aulus Atticus!’

‘What!’ cried the princess, a gleam of barbarian pleasure lending her a flash of life for a moment; ‘Aulus, who offered the blood-money for me?’ Then, as the smile died down, she went on: ‘It was he who stabbed me in the *mêlée*; and my brother, ere he fell dead across me, stabbed him in turn to the heart—my brother—my comrade—he who had no thought in life but my happiness!’

After keeping silent for a time, she asked for water to drink. When I brought some from a rill hard by, she was so weak she could hardly speak, but rallied again as I lifted her gently. ‘It is best like this, Flavius. I should have made but a poor slave—even to you—and you but a poor dweller in the woods. Is he still asleep?’ she asked, pointing to the brother at her side. ‘Oh yes, I remember; he is dead. I kissed him till he died, Flavius, for he loved me with all his heart. Oh, how cold the night-air is!’ Then she grew faint for a minute or two, and on reviving, whispered, ‘You will put me in Knowe, by the city yonder, my Roman; I was born there, and loved it.’ With a little gasp, she took my hand, and the brave, kind eyes looked into mine for a minute; then the dear ruddy head came down gently upon my shoulder. Her spirit had fled.

We put her in Knowe, as she wished, by her own

island town; and generous Legate Agricola, bare-headed, threw the first stone on her mound, crying as he did so, 'To a brave enemy!' They buried her at that place which men thereafter called 'The Woman's Knowe;' and long her name shall be cherished in her country, and as long as breath and life shall continue by him whom she ennobled with her friendship.

AN ADVENTUROUS WEEK.

BY CHARLES EDWARDES.

CHAPTER I.



CRANE at last. I had not bargained for the journey by way of Constantinople, nor had I been warned of the difficulties I should have to overcome ere I could set foot openly in this 'most distressful' of the Mediterranean islands. The Cretans were in revolt. That was the explanation. And Messieurs les Turques were much alarmed lest Europe should substantially aid the rebels and once for all hand the island over to Greece.

We were a strange party on board the *Osman*: Moslem soldiers by the score, their officers a bad-looking lot; some Jews; renegade Greeks who had in their own artful way curried favour with the authorities in Turkey; two Italian doctors; and others.

There was, in fact, but one man with whom I could fraternise. That was Naylor, newspaper free-lance, and much else. How he had got a 'permit' to enter the island I never made out. But he had it, and meant, he declared, to make the most of it.

He and I were on the *Osman's* deck while the steamer screwed itself slowly into the contracted

harbour. I glanced about me eagerly, possessed by a sense of adventure that had never yet stirred me. True, I was only after olives; but, as Naylor said, I was putting myself in the way of a good deal besides those estimable little fruits.

‘Look at the tall house to the left,’ said Naylor, handing me his glass amid the babel of voices; ‘third story, middle window.’

‘Yes?’ I said when I had gazed.

‘The fellow with the fez is the Pasha. I’ll bet my boots he isn’t happy. He has a deluge of blood on his mind already, and he’ll have more before he’s disgraced.’

‘Disgraced—why?’ I asked. The gentleman at the window watching us, Pasha or not, appeared nothing out of the common.

‘Because he’s on the horns of a dilemma, my dear sir. If he crushes the revolt in the usual way (and there’s no other), all the Powers will cry “Shame” on the Sultan and clamour for atonement; his Excellency yonder will then be the scapegoat. And if the Cretans are too much for him, the Vizier and Sultan together will chuck him into obscurity or worse for incompetence. Pleasant position, very!—See those mountains?’

He pointed to a high ridge, well at the back of the jumble of houses. They were a faint purple in the early light, with none of their pinnacles and defiles brought into prominence.

‘That,’ he proceeded, ‘is where the trouble’s at its warmest. That’s Sphakia, and that, please luck and Giorgio Thyatis, is where I’m bound for, Pasha or no Pasha.’

‘Risky,’ I remarked.

‘Risky, of course. But I’m nimble on my pins, and quite as good a shot as the average Turk. The more adventures, the more copy. That’s my *métier*.—Hullo! you’re wanted.’

The *Osman’s* captain had pronounced my name. He was indicating me to a fierce-looking person in Albanian dress, whose other conspicuous characteristics were a tremendous pair of moustaches and a brace of ivory-headed pistols stuck in his waistband. It was the consul’s kavass, as it happened.

‘Follow me!’ said this individual theatrically when I had confirmed the captain’s words.

I nodded to Naylor, said I would see him later at the Canea inn, and mixed myself up in the crowd of strugglers on the loose gangway. As I understood neither Greek nor Turkish, I could not be sure the language I heard was unparliamentary; but, from its sound and emphasis, I think much of it must have been. If so, there was some excuse. Even aided by my huge guide, I did not come out of the trouble without a large bruise on my left leg. An impatient warrior had scraped me hard against one of the iron joints on the gangway railings.

However, we got ashore at length, and Canea’s sweet smells declared themselves to my nose.

The consulate was close to the harbour. I recognised it by its flag. There was a mosque hard by; so near, in fact, that it seemed to be part of the establishment. Its white domes already glowed in the sunlight.

Ordinarily one would not have looked for an official of any kind to be at work at seven o’clock in

the morning. But the times in Crete were extraordinary. Hence our good consul's energy. He greeted me politely enough, and at once proceeded to cross-examine me.

'I must warn you,' he said, 'that you could not have made a greater mistake than to come to Crete for commercial purposes—or any other—just now.'

I said I was sorry to hear it, but proposed to take my chance.

'With whom do you hope to do business?' he continued.

'Nicolopoulos,' I replied, 'is our agent.'

The consul's lips pouted, and he shrugged his shoulders.

'Nothing could be worse,' he said. 'Nicolopoulos is a "suspect." I'm bound to say he deserves to be considered as such, too. If I were you I would abandon my enterprise and return to Constantinople when the *Osman* leaves.'

'Do you mean that he sides openly with the patriots?' I asked, somewhat upset by the news.

'No. If he did that he would be imprisoned. But I will tell you in confidence, Mr Graham, that he may be in custody any day. What that means in the present state of affairs you can guess.'

'Then the harvest this year'——

'May be—in all probability will be—a negative quantity. The Turks are destroying square miles of orchards. The island looks like being so depopulated that there'll be no gathering the fruit that's left.'

I uttered an exclamation of disgust. 'When will the boat return?' I asked.

‘To-morrow, the day after, or the next day; one can never tell.’

‘Oh, in that case there’s time to think it over,’ I replied; ‘and meanwhile I can’t do better than see Nicolopoulos himself.’

‘Very well. You shall have my kavass, and I’ll get you a pass from the Pasha. That isn’t everything in Crete now, you understand; and you can’t be too careful what you do. Look in when you like, and make use of me when you want to.’

I thanked the consul warmly, waited for the governor’s letter, and then set off towards Khalepa for Nicolopoulos.

Had I not seen the streets of the Sultan’s capital, I should have marvelled at the filth and confusion of those of Canea. Both were extreme. The stones of the pavement were slippery with garbage, and stank; and to this evil odour were added others that came from the crowd of Jews, Turks, infidels, and negroes who jostled each other and us, and a third of whom seemed to be swinging blows and curses at the little donkeys, with bent heads and bared hide, which they pushed before them as best they could. The street cries were deafening. I was glad when we had got out of their reach and were through the sombre gateway of the town in the butchers’ quarter. This was a little suggestive of Moslem barbarity, methought, in the way the slaughterers had stuck the heads of their victims on iron pikes and set them at their doors. But, as a matter of fact, the butchers were Greeks for the most part.

The kavass was in a hurry. His strides were needlessly long, considering the Cretan sun and my

own comparative smallness. But I made no protest. If I was only wasting time in Crete, the sooner I settled the programme of my movements the better.

In a little while we struck the coast, near the great ochre walls of the town. There was a breeze on shore, and the sight of the white-capped waves tumbling on to the sand was refreshing. Indeed, Crete looked more exhilarating now every minute. There were red-coats on the walls, trifling and eating out of copper pans, and very merry in spite of the insurrection. I could see the toes of some of the warriors sticking through their broken boots, and holes as big as my head in their jackets. But these are small matters to the military authorities in Turkey, who rely more on muscle and fatalism than mere externals such as discipline and neatness.

After skirting the shore for a time, and passing the famous settlement of Bedouins—a unique thing out of Africa—and a dusty exercising-ground for troops, we struck up towards a rocky eminence with villas and gardens on it. This was Khalepa, the fashionable suburb of Canea. Hence the White Mountains, their purpled sides speckled with sunlight and cloud shadows, looked superb. As I wiped my face I could not refrain from wishing I had Naylor's spirit and ability for adventure to carry me into their midst. It was hard to believe, however, that men were shooting each other up there like so many partridges.

We paused at length outside a residence with a high white wall to it. Even the kavass seemed willing to breathe in comfort for a moment or two.

Then we entered by a green gate, the fastening of

which would have been too much for me unaided. We were in a glorious, leafy avenue, the lower part a bower of roses. On both sides of us was a tangled, beautiful garden. The scent of orange and lemon blossom was a joy to inhale.

My guide strode on in his aggressive, masterful way to the verandahed porch of a pale-blue villa at the end of the avenue. I followed him more at my leisure. It was now that I heard the faint musical twang of a mandoline in the garden. I looked for the musician, but saw no one.

Twice the man rang the bell, the second time with extreme impatience.

‘Never mind,’ I said, in comment upon what I supposed to be an expletive of disgust; ‘now that I know where he lives, I can come out again by myself in the afternoon.’

But this proposition did not please the worthy fellow.

‘I shall go behind,’ he said; ‘perhaps they wash, and do not hear.’

Left to myself, I listened intently. There was something seducing about the mandoline among the blossoms. I could just distinguish the air, which was plaintive.

Then a voice in me bade me seek the author of the sweet sounds, and, without hesitation, I crept through a tangle of vines and sweet-peas, and so gained a clear space under a wide-spreading fig-tree. Beyond, nestled in more greenery, was a tiny arbour, and a figure in white stirred amid the verdure—a girl’s form, with the profile towards me.

I could not at first understand why my heart made

such a fuss about this petty prowling of mine. It beat in my body as if it were seriously disordered. But I read the riddle when I had moved a few steps more and caused the girl suddenly to turn and face me. It realised that it was in the presence of one of God's most beautiful creations.

I cannot describe her except in bald category. She may have been seventeen or eighteen: appearances, however, are deceptive in the warm South. She was tall and slender, with features of extraordinary regularity and softness combined. There was a lovely colour in her cheeks as she looked at me with parted lips, and an expression in which surprise and something of timidity were sweetly blended. And her eyes were large, and of that rare true violet colour which I am told is only to be found in Crete, and that seldom. She held the mandoline to her side with her left hand, round which a handkerchief was wrapped.

Never have I seen any one so beautiful. I don't know that I was more susceptible than other men of seven-and-twenty, but I know that it was all I could do to keep myself from approaching this girl and kneeling to her, as if she were the goddess of Beauty herself.

The voice of that miserable kavass crying 'Monsieur! monsieur!' came as a most undesirable distraction. Yet perhaps it was as well. Otherwise, in my infatuation, there is no telling what I might not have done. And so, instead of allowing my heart to confess its folly by a word or a look, I merely raised my hat and returned to the avenue.

'That was not right, monsieur,' exclaimed the

kavass when I came out alongside of his petticoated legs.

‘At any rate,’ I replied, ‘it is my own affair.—Is he not in?’

‘I shall find him for you if you will return with me,’ was the sullen rejoinder.

I listened afresh for the mandoline, but could not hear it. I tried to pierce the lattice-work of fruit-trees, creepers, and flowers for one more glimpse of that wonderful face; but it was in vain.

We returned to the hot, dusty road, my haughty guide taking longer strides than ever. Once I questioned him about the girl in the garden. He answered with a look that ought to have set me laughing, but which irritated me extremely instead. Only when we were nearing the town did a sensible idea enter my head.

‘Wait a moment,’ I said, with my hand in my pocket. ‘Isn’t that a wine-shop?’

It was a commonplace little booth, with a bush over the porch; a wine-shop, sure enough.

‘Here’s something for yourself, my friend,’ I added. ‘You have wasted much time on me; and we are both thirsty, or ought to be.’

The exuberant salute with which the man acknowledged the tip told me I had done the proper thing. We entered the shanty and drank malvasia, the blue-breeched Cretan who served us staring considerably.

‘You think we shall find Nicolopoulos this time?’ I began diplomatically.

‘I think so, sir. He has a sick wife. He visits her once a week. This is the day.’

‘A sick wife ! What an odd thing that she doesn’t live with him !’

The kavass shook his head gravely, drank, and then wiped one end of his moustaches : it had dropped into his wine-glass like a rat’s tail.

‘By the way,’ I continued as indifferently as possible, ‘I saw up there in the garden a young lady in white.’

‘Ah ! you see her ?’

The man’s animation piqued me.

‘Yes. Who is she ?’

‘She is the only child, the daughter, poor thing !’ said the kavass. He cooled his red face with his white skirts in a most unbecoming manner.

‘Nicolopoulos’s daughter ?’

‘That is it, sir. She is fine to see, but it is not good to love her.’

At these words I am afraid I blushed ; and for the second or third time in our brief acquaintance I yearned to kick the kavass. I did not condescend to ask for an explanation.

‘What is her name ?’ I inquired instead.

‘I have heard, sir, that she is called Helena. But no matter what she is called. And now, please, we must go.’

Helena !

I tongued the name a hundred times ere we were through the town by one gate and out of it by another. It was the very name for so pure and spotless a maiden. It also fitted her beauty like no other name. I assured myself that even as of old Helen of Troy was the most lovely damsel among mankind, so Helena Nicolopoulos of Khalepa, Crete,

was just as matchless. This was significant enough. But my state was proved to conviction by the determination that entered me not to sail by the *Osman*, even though I could not do a farthing's worth of business with Nicolopoulos or any one else.

This time we left Canea as if we were going straight to Sphakia. The green plain stretched before us to the first of the purple swellings which, rising one above the other, get to a height of eight thousand feet with sublime abruptness.

We passed the lepers of the town, squatted on the sand among the aloes of the roadside. '*Aman! aman!*' ('Pity! pity!') they cried, as they showed their blotched and swollen bodies, fingerless hands, and toeless feet or stumps of feet.

'Are there many of them in Crete?' I asked the kavass. He had set me the good example of charity.

'There are many, monsieur,' he replied. 'We come now to the houses.'

It was the leper village, in fact; a coterie of little white dwellings set close together, and hedged about with prickly-pear, aloes, and tamarisk bushes. Convenient, too, for the begging purposes of the inmates, seeing that the high-road to the villages of the plain traversed their midst.

'Wait,' I said; 'I should like to look inside one of the houses.'

'There is not need to wait to do it,' said my guide. 'We go to the last one to find Nicolopoulos.'

'What! here?' I exclaimed.

'It is his wife. She is a leper, monsieur, like others.'

'A leper!'

The mother of Helena Nicolopoulos a leper ! The bare suggestion seemed to act upon me like a poison. And yet it was too brutal a possibility to be entertained.

But, sure enough, as we were approaching the end of the village, Nicolopoulos, gray-bearded and stately, and with something of the sternness of Greek tragedy in his face, came from within and met us. His greeting was as dignified and tragic as his countenance.

‘I do not do business this year,’ he replied to my question, which I fear I put with cold-blooded promptitude after a minute or two.

‘But as agent merely’——

‘It is all one, sir. I think I give up my business altogether. There is reasons that I will not tell: God knows there is reasons. And, another thing, it is not worth your while to make much thought of the oil here this year. There will be much fire in Crete, and fire burn oil. You understand !’

This with a meaning look. Then he turned and said something to the kavass in Greek. The kavass replied with a shrug of the shoulders almost to his ears. He made so long an answer, sinking his voice lower and lower, that, having looked long enough at the handsome though ragged countryman who was coming towards us from Canea, I turned towards the hovel in which Madame Nicolopoulos the leper lived. It was too horrible to think of.

But the sight I now saw was even more horrible still. A woman was standing at the threshold of the house. Her sex was hardly more than conjecturable

by her dress, which hung about her like a sack tied at the waist. She did not seem inordinately large in the body, but her face was little better than a purple patch, radiant as if it had been rubbed with oil. Nose and lips seemed wanting, and the eyes were almost closed by the swellings above and beneath their cavities.

This poor object was beckoning. I shuddered in spite of my efforts to do no such thing, touched Nicolopoulos on the shoulder to draw his attention to her, and turned away.

‘I shall see you again, if you will do me the favour,’ said the merchant.

In this suggestion I acquiesced eagerly enough.

‘And now for the inn,’ I said to the kavass. ‘It is quite time to release you.’

Nicolopoulos rejoined his wife—his awful wife, whom he still loved, poor fellow! We set our faces towards Canea.

We were passing the countryman already mentioned, when the kavass suddenly drew himself up and put on the braggart air that goes so comically with the starched petticoats of the Greek warrior.

The two exchanged a salutation, brief but, as it seemed to me, forcible. There was even more determination in the other’s face than in the kavass’s.

‘Who is that good-looking man?’ I asked. ‘Any one might suppose he was in a disguise.’

‘That,’ said the kavass, ‘is Giorgio Thyatis, the Sphakiot. He is bold to come into the city. His life is wanted, and he will lose it one day.’

I remembered the name Thyatis as that of Naylor’s patriot, and turned to have another look at the

splendid Cretan. I was just in time to see him slip into the hovel that held Nicolopoulos and his wife—Helena's mother!

CHAPTER II.

HE Canea inn was not a place I should have cared to spend a week in. I found it cumbered with Turkish officers, including two of our ruffianly fellow-passengers on the *Osman*. There were also other officials: they must have been that, from their ridiculous air of importance. And the courtyard (with a well in the middle, the water of which I would not have drunk for a hundred pounds) was thick with tatterdemalions of the mendicant breed, as well as long-tailed horses and baggage-mules.

I wished I had learned a little conversational Greek. The good kavass was satisfied to leave me at the inn door. Thence I prowled from room to room seeking Naylor, and replying to the interrogations of the landlord (a broad-shouldered rogue of a Greek) with nods of regret at my inability either to understand his observations or offer him any that he could understand. A certain Turk, Cusseim Bimbashi, as I learned later, seemed much amused in a sardonic way at my predicament. He smoked and smiled; and I conceived a hatred of him, unreasonable of course, yet justified by intuition.

At last I hit upon the roving correspondent. I heard the murmur of song of an unmistakably British

kind from behind a door in the bedroom corridor. At this door I knocked, and Naylor's voice replied.

He was writing, singing, and smoking at the same time, but dropped his pen when he saw me.

'The very man I wanted,' he exclaimed. 'I wish you'd do something for me.'

'What?'

'Well, I reckon you don't propose to waste your valuable hours here. Will you take a letter for me when you return to the Bosphorus?'

'I'm not so sure that I go back with the *Osman*,' I replied.

'Oh, then I'm just as glad to know that I shall have a friend and compatriot in the land.—Look here, Graham: is that door shut?'

I made sure that it was.

'Not that it matters much,' Naylor continued, laughing. 'There's no one here who was born and bred in London, and I'm Cockney to the bone. But I've got my business settled, and it's likely to start with a fair amount of hazard.'

'Drive on,' I said, with thoughts of Helena Nicolopoulos still engrossing me.

'Listen. I've squared the authorities in Canea to such a tune that I'm off with a detachment of those Turkish beauties this very night to Lakko, or some such place. They think my sympathies and those of my paper (I wish I knew which it was; but never mind that)—they think we're philo-Turk. That means that I am to be discreetly blind to all inhumanity, and that I'm to call the patriots every hard name I can forge. So far well. But this time to-morrow I shall be on quite the other tack; and of

those beauties downstairs, if one or two survive it'll be a wonder. I believe a Sphakiot can hit a bee on the wing by day, or a flying bat by night. Well, they'll have some easier sport than that ere cockcrow again.'

'Take care what you're about, Naylor,' I said, with only a vague idea, however, of his little plan or plot.

'I shall do that, of course. Meanwhile, give me five minutes more to finish this letter. As you are not sure as to your own movements, I must get this off in the common post-bag. Help yourself to tobacco: best Turkish at half-a-crown a pound, and warranted pure.'

I watched him scribbling while I smoked. His devil-may-care tone interested me. It did more; it evoked a sort of responsive chord in my own nature. Commonplace commercial interests seemed a poor affair to this gamble between life and death in which he was engaged. Why should not I, too, see a little of the sterner and most exciting side of life?

'Look here, Naylor,' I said when he had finished and sighed contentedly; 'I'd like much to go with you.'

'To the seat of war?' he inquired, surprised.

'Yes, anywhere up yonder.' I nodded, as I supposed, towards Sphakia.

'Really, old man?'

'Candidly.'

'It's a cool toss-up whether you'd come out of it alive. You see that?'

'I understand that.'

'My dear Graham,' said Naylor, rubbing his hands, 'you delight me exceedingly; but I mustn't keep

you the least bit in the dark about it. The fact is, you remember a fellow named Thyatis that I mentioned ?'

'Yes. I have seen him too.'

'How did you know him ?'

'The consul's kavass recognised him, and '——

'Hang the fool's sharp eyes and Giorgio's sublime audacity ! However, I dare say his usual luck will pull him through all right. They think him a sort of "Jupiter Omnipotens" in Athens ; and, upon my soul, there's something in it. But I'll tell you all, and then you'll see what a fellow he is. As soon as I got off the boat I met Thyatis at a little den I'd been told of. A fellow took me there : Thyatis had sent him. Well, there were six or eight more, every man Jack of whom would be shot or flayed alive without parley if he were in the hands of the Sultan's lot. They arranged things between them. I gather that up by Lakko the Moslems are getting the worst of it, and have gone into blockhouses or something, pending relief or further orders. The relief party starts to-night, accompanied by me. It isn't a very strong batch, but the officers are of the neck-or-nothing kind, who'd scorn to give quarter to any one. That's good enough booty for Thyatis and his comrades up there. And so, in a convenient little defile we wot of, there will be preparations for an ambushade that shall crush the life out of every soul—including mine, if I don't look precious sharp about it. After that, if I get through, there'll be hand-shaking, wine-drinking, and feasting with the patriots, and I'll have a surfeit of local colour and tragic incidents. The storming of the blockhouses is to follow hard

on. In a week we may see the Pasha superseded, if not expelled, by the patriots, and Sphakia ruling in Canea. One never knows how things will turn out. But, anyway, that's the programme, and I've let you into a secret I ought to have kept to myself.'

Naylor's words had set the blood galloping in me. What was oil-buying to this sort of experience?

'If you can manage it,' I said, 'I'll face all risks to be with you.'

'Good! What papers have you got?'

I showed him my passport, which was in Greek and Turkish. It was a general safe-conduct in the island, and contained an order for all the authorities to do their utmost for my protection. Naylor read it with chuckles.

'It'll do, my boy,' he said; 'it'll do. I'm afraid we shall both be playing *la perfide Albion* a bit; but there's this about it: Thyatis and his men will do their work whether we're with them or not.'

'Then it's an agreed thing, Naylor?' I inquired.

'Here's my hand on it, old chap. We'll have some sport together, as sure as eggs. My instructions to you are these: keep out of the way of our worshipful consul, lest he ask tiresome questions entailing equivocal answers or worse; and allow me to spring your plan upon Cusseim Bimbashi when the expedition is on the point of starting—not a moment before. And now, how's your appetite, and do you carry a reliable revolver?'

As it happened, I had both a good appetite and a good little five-chambered Webley, with a hundred cartridges.

Naylor then ordered dinner. The landlord bowed

very low to him, believing him to be a representative of Great Britain, sent direct by Her Majesty the Queen to report on the war; a delusion which the correspondent did not mind fostering until it was time to pay his bill.

Afterwards I too had to write letters. These did not come so easy to me as Naylor's to him. I had to be discreet with my partner; and I had to give my mother a hint—and nothing more than a hint—about the difficulty of postal communication between England and an island at present somewhat (only somewhat) disturbed. But my pen ran away with me, and when I re-read the latter epistle I found I had written more than half a page devoted entirely to Helena Nicolopoulos. After due deliberation, I decided that I would not erase these ten or eleven lines. Perhaps Providence was at the root of the matter. Other Englishmen had married Greek girls and not regretted it. But I knew just how my good mother would shake her head when she read that page, the greater part of which had come out apparently red-hot from my heart.

We dined in rather a distinguished manner. The two men who waited on us were armed with valuable little daggers and tinkled with silver chains; and the landlord himself helped with the dishes and the wines. The latter were like the Cretan character—distinctly strong and fiery.

Dinner over, we agreed to separate. Naylor was no doubt right in his conjecture that we ought not to be seen too much together. Certainly he was if our consul had had intelligence (which was likely) of my friend's meeting with the bold Thyatis.

'Take a stroll for your health's sake, old man,' said Naylor. 'Only, mind your bearings, control your temper, and be sure you are here again before sunset. They shut the gates then, and are pretty particular afterwards whom they let in or out.'

I suppose it wasn't very wonderful that I should find my way again to Khalepa. It was the only place I knew. That was one thing. And the villas with their gardens, and the red and gray background of the crags of Akrotiri, made up a bright picture, other allurements apart.

But of course the girl in white, with the violet eyes and the mandoline, was my main attraction thither.

I felt like an ill-conditioned schoolboy when I found myself in that avenue again. This time there was no music—nothing but the chirp of grasshoppers. The sun was scorching outside, and succeeded even in burning its way through the arcade of flowers and verdure.

Nicolopoulos was in, and apparently glad to see me. He gave me coffee and cigarettes, and every verbal encouragement to get out of Crete. He was as unlike a mercantile Greek as man could be. But no word of his daughter did he volunteer; nor could I hear any sound significative of her presence in the house.

Once I all but let out the secret of my change of plans, hoping to stimulate him into ardour and perhaps a show of domestic confidence. But I wisely held my tongue. There is no such dangerous confederate in Eastern politics as a Greek; and, after all, I had no positive assurance that Nicolopoulos's

sympathies were with the Christians rather than the Moslems of the island, Christian though of course he himself was.

His coffee was excellent. That was the sum-total of the result of my little afternoon call.

When an hour had passed I had no alternative but to rise. The merchant did not press me to stay.

But as Nicolopoulos opened his door to let me out, I saw a flutter of white drift across the path and disappear amid the trees in the direction of the summer-house. My host's eyes shot also in that direction.

'What was it?' I asked, though I knew all too well.

'It was nothing, Mr Graham—nothing that has to do with us,' he said, lying deliberately.

From his tone I knew it was futile to try and mix myself up with his family affairs. This realisation depressed me greatly.

The next moment, however, I caught sight of a hammock swung on the other side of the avenue, between two well-grown orange-trees, and a newspaper half in the hammock.

'Pardon me — what magnificent trees!' I exclaimed as I stepped towards the paper.

'The climate is good for the oranges,' said Nicolopoulos; 'but they are best in the plain.'

I had espied some frayed roses in the netting. They had been picked, toyed with, and abandoned; instinct readily told me by whom. It was easy to take one of them, smell it idly, turn and rejoin Nicolopoulos, and then put it in my pocket.

My visit had not been in vain, after all. Those

crumpled, perfumed petals were an incredible joy to me as I tramped back to Canea through the dust.

So much so indeed that they, and little besides, made me stop by the shore, clamber into a rocky recess, and stay thus perched for a good hour or more. I fondled those rose-leaves absurdly—why should not I confess it? And I looked at them considerably more than at the lazy Mediterranean waves, which now only throbbed upon the Cretan sands and rocks. The eternal bugling on the Canea walls still continued, softened a little by distance. But the echo of those sweeter sounds of the morning was more powerful in me than all else.

It was a mere day-dream, yet it made its mark on me. I rambled back into Canea, thinking precious little about the impending adventure of the evening. It was getting dusk when I re-entered the inn, the smells of which were unmistakably of the kind that flourish about the time of sundown.

But I had soon to pull myself together, at Naylor's instigation.

We were to start at ten o'clock. He had contrived to hire a mule for me, and also to make friends with Cusseim Bimbashi as a preliminary to my introduction into the troop. And he had obtained his own and my bill from the inn landlord, and was digesting it badly.

The quarrel that ensued upon this last was sharp and not exactly short. Naylor had the impudence to propose to knock off the final nought in the number of piastres. He managed eventually to reduce the amount by one-half. The Bimbashi, who was present during this little contest, buckling on his pistols and

issuing his orders to a nimble servant, seemed amused as ever. He was less amused when Naylor showed him my firman, and made him aware that he would have two Englishmen instead of one to take care of. He examined the authority very narrowly, using spectacles for the purpose, and at one time seemed inclined to send to the governor for his orders. But Naylor's tact came to the rescue.

And so, shortly after ten, with all the clatter so dearly loved by Orientals, we moved noisily up the pent streets. I had a feeling that every latticed window on either hand had a face to it, peering at us, and probably cursing us. But the stars were radiant overhead, and the white shafts of the minarets, as we passed them by, were good to see in the pallid light.

'Whatever you do, keep alongside me,' Naylor had said at starting. He had his pipe in his mouth, and seemed quite happy.

For some hours we were free to taste the undiluted romance of our journey. It would be broad daylight ere the troop could hope to be in the highlands, which seemed a silly freak of mismanagement, if it was the design of this hundred or two soldiers to steal unperceived to the relief of their comrades. The better for us, methought. If the Sphakiots were such smart marksmen, they could not then fail to distinguish us in our civilian dress from the red-coated Moslems. Yet, on the other hand, only Naylor was expected, which might make it awkward for me.

We passed the leper village, and the hovel of Helena's mother last of all. It made my blood heat in my veins to think afresh of this horror. I had

to expel by sheer force of will the reflections that followed.

The farther we proceeded the higher Naylor's spirits rose. He hummed opera airs, and between whiles whispered to me all kinds of information.

Of a certain mass of ruins that we left on our right hand (there was a nightingale in one of the undestroyed trees about it) he told me some horrible tales, on what authority I know not. Two or three dozen Christians had been massacred here in cold blood, and the monks—for it had been a monastery—had had their beards torn out by the roots. He was even more interested in my mule than I was. The animal was not in good condition and needed constant spurring. He aided my own uncivil attentions by kicking the poor brute now and then with one of his exceptionally long legs.

I had believed the plain to be thickly peopled with villages; but we skirted only one. The fact was that we kept to byroads, or rather paths—and shocking enough they were—so that our passage should be as secret as possible. Our route was thus somewhat sinuous, and there were times when, if my mule had stumbled badly, I should have had a good chance of being impaled on the stout blades of the aloes which served as an extremely close hedge.

Twice we forded a wide stream in which the water ran fast from the mountains, with gloomy ravines higher up. The troopers did not hold their tongues here. Neither they nor the officers' horses (nor our mules either) liked the snow-cold water.

Then our course led us up and up by the roughest of routes. We zigzagged one after the other, slipping

and stumbling, and the stars above seemed to twinkle derisively at us. You see, this nocturnal trip and its possible eventualities had got hold of my imagination. Helena Nicolopoulos also had an effect on my fancy, which hitherto no one had reckoned a vivid or fantastic one.

With the slow breaking of the dawn I began to experience some of the pains as well as the pleasures of excitement. The gray light crept over us and our mountainous surroundings with most disagreeable suggestiveness. I marked the growing eagerness in Naylor's face, and how he scanned the pinnacles and ridges which gradually declared themselves above us. Nor was he alone in this. Cusseim Bimbashi and another of the officers showed more vigilance than I expected of them. They sent skirmishers forward and had their glasses to their eyes every other minute.

From this time Naylor and I stole little by little to the rear of the troop.

'That's our cue,' he said. 'It might go hard with us else.'

Cusseim at one moment seemed to notice what we were doing. But the eternal smile on his face now said somewhat plainly, 'These fine Englishmen are afraid. So be it. Let them do as they will.'

His policy of non-interference suited us admirably.

Under milder circumstances I could have enjoyed intensely the sunrise as we saw it from the heights we had reached. A huge dome of rock, speckled with snow high in front, flushed crimson, and the crimson changed to gold, which slowly descended one of its sides. Looking backwards, we had also a

glimpse of the pale golden light flooding the great plain we had crossed. White villages and green orchards and gardens were briefly transfigured.

Very briefly, though ; for almost immediately afterwards we entered a dark shadowy cañon down which a cold breath blew in our faces.

‘Graham,’ Naylor whispered. We were more quiet in the rear. The officer on the gray horse at the tail of the troop was five or six good paces in front of us.

‘Yes.’

‘Pull yourself together. This is about the place.’

My senses were instantly on the alert. I looked up at the red and black sides of the ravine, and at the brawling torrent on our left hand. It was certainly a fearful place to be entrapped in.

Then I looked back and saw two armed men dart under cover. The wind caught their wide blue breeches and bellied them for a moment.

‘That’s all right,’ said Naylor when I told him what I had seen. ‘The surer they make it the better for us.’

At the same time, it was an uncomfortable sensation to feel that at any moment we might be potted from behind, and that not a single red-coat stood between us and those redoubtable highlanders in the rear.

But suddenly this sense of uneasiness was ousted by something keener. There was a crashing sound, an outburst of cries from officers and men, several score of brown faces (for the moment almost white with terror) were turned skywards, and then a rock, weighing I know not how many tons, crunched into

the middle of the hapless Moslems. The cracking of many muskets followed. We were attacked with a vengeance.

‘Off with you!’ shouted Naylor as he jumped from his mule. ‘We must get shelter.’

It was not easy to find, but we obtained some in the river-bed, under the lee of a huge boulder. Hence Naylor held forth a common cotton pocket-handkerchief on the end of his riding-whip. There was a Union-jack on the handkerchief, and we both trusted with all our hearts that every Sphakiot above and in the ravine had been taught by Thyatis what this token signified.

The riot and shouting above and in front were strangely exhilarating to me. This was war of a kind, and I seemed to like it. But I know not how it would have been if we had been compelled, like the doomed soldiers, to do battle against such terrible odds.

We could not see much that was going on. Prudence bade us keep our heads concealed. Now and again, though, we watched the red-coats reel by ones and twos into the river higher up, and then lie down or struggle. One rather small soldier was carried down past us in the middle of the waters, and a bullet hissed into the stream close to him, and annoyingly close to us also.

It was mere butchery, as it happened. The shouts above increased, and those before and behind the Sultan’s men drew nearer and nearer as the number of shots lessened.

Naylor kept up a running comment on the different phases of the engagement. Once he was about to

stand up, when a sharp exchange of fire took place in the neighbourhood.

‘A narrow thing that!’ he whispered as we huddled together again.

But it was really the final volley. Nothing remained to be done except cut the throats of the wounded; and this ghastly work was fast being carried through, when Thyatis himself descended gaily to us and summoned Naylor forth.

‘A friend, Giorgio!’ cried the latter in French, as we stood erect and began to clamber up to the track.

A cordial hand-shake from the magnificent patriot, whose eyes glowed with victory, very soon dispelled all doubts about my reception. ‘Magnificent’ is none too big a word to use about Giorgio Thyatis as he then appeared. From his red-tasselled Cretan fez to his pale-blue jacket, studded with silver buttons (and his waistcoat the same), his dark-blue baggy breeches, and his yellow leather top-boots, he looked a splendid fellow. And the smoking gun on his shoulder showed that he was not a mere verbal conspirator, like so many others who cried, ‘Fight, fight! brave children!’ and themselves stayed in Athens to watch the issue of the duel.

The throat-cutting was too much for me. Perhaps it *was* necessary, and I dare say if the Moslems had won the day they would have done worse things with the wounded patriots. But it was a sickening business. I set my back to it and smoked a cigarette, while Naylor, Thyatis, and two others carried on a conversation.

By-and-by Naylor turned to me.

'You're sure you haven't changed your mind, Graham?' he asked.

'Not I,' I replied; 'but this butchery beats me.'

'Yes, it's too bad; but they've no alternative. Look here; I'm going to run off a few lines. One of them's got to work his way into Canea to let the committee know about it. He'll take the letter.'

A long-legged highlander, with moustaches even more remarkable than those of the consul's kavass, here approached with a Moslem drum. He smiled all across his face, and his right hand was bloody.

Having placed the drum on the ground before Naylor, he saluted, and was about to retire, when my friend stopped him and asked:

'What place is this?'

'Zurra, Kyrie.'

'Thank you,' said Naylor. 'Then we will stretch a point and call it the battle of Zurra. "Massacre" would fit the case better, but I'm philo-Cretan now. Sixty-five patriots wipe out a detachment of one hundred and eighty Moslems—not a soul survives; and all with a loss of only two killed and four wounded.'

'Are those the facts, Naylor?' I asked.

'Yes, and quite good enough on which to make up something startling for my dear British public. And now, don't speak a word for the next half-hour, my dear fellow.'

I sat smoking, and watched Naylor's pen dashing over the paper, watched the piling of the dead Turks in heaps as far from the river as possible (not far, that is), saw the patriots fish out the bodies from the water, refresh themselves from the little wooden

barrels they carried at the waist, as well as cartridges and knives galore, and roll cigarettes one after the other. A procession of ten or twelve men rapidly disappeared in the defile, with the wounded in slings. And Giorgio Thyatis the superb seemed everywhere at once.

Here too, in spite of the incongruity of the thing, I thought of Nicolopoulos's daughter. But she seemed more distant from me than seven or eight hours ago, and that was painful to realise.

CHAPTER III.

E had been four days among the Sphakiots—four healthy, exciting, memorable days. I had shot a Turk, and made up my mind that, come what might, I would not fire at another man. The poor fellow had come almost up to my revolver in clambering over the rocks; and, to save myself, I pulled the trigger, severely wounding him. To the patriots it was a proof of the genuineness of my sympathy with them; but to myself it was nothing of the kind. I had almost taken the life of a man—in self-defence, it is true, and not in pure wantonness—but my very uncomfortable feelings on the subject prove clearly to myself that I was a better civilian than soldier.

There was joy in Sphakia. After the Zurra affair, for two days and the better part of two nights, it seemed to the patriots that they had only one thing left to them—to divide the island among themselves.

Greece was a fine enough name to conjure with, and the *Panhellenion* periodically brought them arms, black rice (*alias* 'gunpowder'), and provisions. But few indeed were the Athenians who came to put themselves in the way of Turkish bullets and knives; and therefore, argued Sphakia, though Greece deserved thanks, she did not merit Crete. Crete, in fact, should be independent, and the Sphakiots should administer the island.

Naylor enjoyed himself. He said so, and looked like it. He wrote much 'copy,' but was unable to get rid of it. The *Osman*, we heard, had returned to Constantinople, and though there were two or three cunning little craft in the bays of the coast under the mountains, they were unable to get out for the Turkish cruisers. These last we could see from our eyries, the drift of their funnel smoke lying in motionless long lines across the horizon, above the sparkling water.

'Never mind,' said Naylor when I remarked upon his useless expenditure of energy with ink and paper; 'a time will come. My narrative bristles with actuality, and sooner or later it will get a billet.'

We had a companion here among the rocks and snow-drifts in the crevices—one Gaston de Blessant, a roving blade like Naylor himself, only with tastes more classic than ours. He was a lively, open-hearted fellow, with Homer at his tongue-tip. He was also a capital shot, as the Moslems had learned to their sorrow.

The three of us were honoured guests with the mountaineers, and though we were willing enough to take pot-luck with the patriots, the best of everything obtainable was given to us first of all. Not that 'the

best' meant much. But it meant good wine, which was something; and it meant plenty of mutton and hard Sphakia cheese.

Meanwhile the news of the Zurra incident had reached Canea. It was received furiously—so we heard. Warm reprisals were expected, and we prepared for them. The blockhouse on its perch, with some four hundred Turks in it, still stood as a menace to our part of Sphakia, though daily half-a-dozen or more of the warriors engaged in desperate sorties upon us never re-entered it!

It was now decided to storm the blockhouse without loss of time. That done, Sphakia might again acclaim itself, and there would be fair cause for hope that the Moslems might in a month or a year be expelled the island for ever.

Each hour saw an addition to Thyatis's forces after this determination had been made. They came from the plain of Anapolis to the south on the seaboard, and from Askyfo to the east; and there was hardly any direction in which we could look among the gray needles and crags of the Madara Vouna whence blue-breeched, long-legged mountaineers had not by twos and threes scrambled into our midst. They all moved with the agility of goats, and with their gun-barrels ready at an instant's notice to be levelled at a red-coat.

The night before the attack our village gave itself up to revels. All took part in them: old white-haired men, women, girls, and children. And we Europeans did our little best to add to the fun.

While there was daylight, shooting at the Turk's head was the sport most relished. This effigy (not a real head, thank goodness!) provided Naylor, poor

fellow ! with a telling paragraph or two about the Sphakiot as a marksman. I could do nothing with it at any creditable distance ; but both Naylor and De Blessant were applauded by the crowd for their skill.

Dancing and eating and drinking followed. There were also prayers in the little church. The priest's maledictions on his country's oppressors were evidently joined in heartily by the congregation. For my part, however, I was even more struck by the picture made by these stalwart insurgents as they packed the dimly-lit, mildewed building. I declare the fire in their eyes was a better illuminant than the lamps overhead. The clink of their arms and ornaments was also more melodious than the worthy priest's eccentric chanting.

The improvised songs by the bonfires later, with wine passing freely, were as odd as the priest's discordancies. The vocalists put us in their stanzas, and civilly exaggerated our good qualities, or what they took for such. De Blessant translated some of their eulogistic adjectives. These ought to have stimulated us very much.

But the chants were not all warlike. The Sphakiot is as ardent in love as in his hatred of the Turk, and he shows it in his verse. I was fain to finger the rose-leaves in my waistcoat pocket when these softer sentiments were in the air, to the accompaniment of the native *bulgarie*, a rude kind of mandoline. But, alas ! I felt more and more that Helena Nicolopoulos was destined to become little better than a dream-image to me. How could I, after my conduct with these insurgents, ever again hope to be

allowed to walk openly to Khalepa and the rose-bowered garden? Unless, indeed, the insurrection succeeded—a consummation scarcely likely, according to precedent. Yet even as a mere dream-image this lovely girl was dear to me.

We three sat together among the five or six leaders of the Sphakiots. The mountains formed a black wall close behind the village, the houses of which seemed to advance and recede with the rising and dwindling of the flames of the fires.

De Blessant diverted us with his presentiments. He pretended to be as superstitious as the mountaineers themselves.

‘That’s all stuff, you know,’ said Naylor, with a laugh. The Frenchman had declared gravely that he knew he should fall on the morrow.

‘I do not think so, my friend,’ retorted De Blessant. ‘Protect my body from outrage; that is all I beg of you.’

‘All right, old chap; and we’ll drink a bottle of Parnasse with it in Athens by-and-by.’

‘You English are so cold,’ protested the other. ‘I am in love, too. That is the sadness of it. But it cannot be helped.’

This with a downright French shrug.

‘He jests at wounds who doesn’t mean to get one,’ said Naylor; ‘that’s about it, isn’t it, Graham?’

‘We’ll hope so,’ I replied.

‘Then jest yourself, my boy.’

‘Set me the example and I will. I’m afraid I’m not a humorous subject. But look here, Naylor,’ I could not refrain from adding, most conventionally, ‘if anything should happen to me’——

For answer he burst out laughing, and said, 'My dear fellow, none of that, for mercy's sake. It's played out. We're not going to die, either of us—any one of us, I mean, *mon cher*'—with a nod to De Blessant. 'It will be a little pistol practice—nothing more, on my honour.'

But the Frenchman sighed, and professed to disbelieve Naylor's sentiments.

'You do not know,' he said mournfully.

Now, this sort of thing was not inspiring, even if it was all mere imagination. It had its effect on me for one, and when we lay down to sleep, in a room full of warriors, I could do nothing but toss about until the cold dawn light slid stealthily upon us.

The morning made these weak anticipations seem as absurd as perhaps they were. With the sound of gay voices I too found something like courage in me. The Sphakiot cocks crew in the village as valorously as the mountaineers, and the hissing sound of swords and knives getting their last touch of sharpness on the village grindstones was as enlivening as a tonic.

No time was lost. The summer heat-mist was still on the Mediterranean when Thyatis and the other leaders began to marshal their men into companies. We could not see the cruisers. But, as if specially to encourage us, just at this time the slim body of the famous insurrectionary blockade-runner, the *Panhellenion*, was noticed gliding close inshore towards the port of Sphakia. She had successfully made yet another of her many trips from Athens, past the stern fortress-prison of Grabusa, on Crete's north-western headland, and so round, under cover of the night, to

the people who longed for her. The cheers that greeted the sight of her might almost have been heard on board.

‘This night,’ said Thyatis, with a proud uplifting of his chin, ‘she shall carry great news to the continent.’

‘Let’s hope it,’ responded De Blessant.

For a man who was prepared to be a corpse ere sunset, the Frenchman was singularly solicitous about the future. He expected letters by the patriotic boat, and was precise in his orders that they were to be brought up without delay, to be perused after the taking of the blockhouse.

Naylor, on the other hand, was in his old dare-devil mood. He went whistling to and fro, clapping the Sphakiot warriors on the shoulders, and airing his Greek phrases on them, with glorious carelessness whether they could be understood or not.

The parting with the womenkind was not without its notes of pathos. They are doughty souls in Sphakia, men and women alike; but this was a grave occasion. If the attack failed, it might mean the overrunning by Moslem troops, in their worst humour, of this part of the highlands. There were young brides in the village, as well as the mothers of many well-knit patriots. Poor souls! It was not to be wondered at if they had the glisten of tears in their eyes as they embraced their dear ones, and blessed them with the floridity of language that comes naturally to the southerner at such times.

The best touch of all was given by the blessing of our banners. An old priest with a white beard was led out (he was blind), and in the presence of us all

he appealed to God and the saints on our behalf, with his palsied hands first on one flag and then on another. He had been through several insurrections, poor old fellow, and though enthusiasm still lingered in him, he was evidently not without his doubts.

We three were under Thyatis. Our banner was of blue silk, with the head of Leonidas worked on it, and the words 'Enough of servitude' for a device.

I confess it was not without a thrill that I heard our leader inquire, 'You will desire to be in front, gentlemen?' and Naylor's assurance that that was precisely what we wished most.

But, after all, what did it matter? methought. I tried, with fair success, to play the fatalist. If I was destined to end my life in the mountains of Crete, and leave the firm of Renton & Graham without its junior partner on such-and-such a day, of what use to wriggle meanly against the iron hand of the inevitable? And so I gripped my revolver and squared my shoulders, and smiled as if we were bound on a mere picnic excursion.

'We're in for it now, old chap,' said Naylor, with a chuckle. 'Shoot straight when the time comes.'

'Right, Naylor,' I replied, though still resolved, if I shot at all, it should be as crookedly as possible. I had acted the fool ere this in life—the other day at Khalepa, perhaps, for example: why not once more?

And so the start was made, and soon we lost sight of the houses beneath us, and the rigid forms of the sad-hearted women and helpless veterans who watched us go.

The blockhouse was some two or three miles from the village. Awful miles! indescribable miles! I

was prepared to have my heart brought towards my throat by Moslem muskets, but not to be frightened by rocks and precipices. Yet these last were perfectly appalling. We had to crawl along the edges of some in single file, with the subdued roar of water a thousand and more feet below, clamouring for us if we slipped; and we had also to get up the face of rock-walls that I would never have touched but for this desperate game of 'follow the leader.'

For two hours this sort of thing lasted. Then came a quiet halt and collection of forces. There was much mopping of brows and a certain amount of drinking—very necessary under the circumstances. The sun blazed on us from over the shoulder of one of the highest peaks of the Madara Vouna close by, with a great patch of snow in a dimple on its side. But it was no time to think of nature's grandeur, for barely half a mile away was the straight line of the roof of the blockhouse. More than that of it was at present invisible.

'We're in luck, my friends,' De Blessant confided to us after some words with the chiefs. 'They had expected to find certain of the "accursed ones" exercising outside. We shall perhaps now take them better unprepared.'

The last words of instruction were given, and then our army of nearly a thousand fighting men (less one, myself) was divided into three bodies. We remained with the central contingent. The other two made flank movements. I thought it rather comforting not to lose sight of the fine blue banner with the head on it. I thought also (odd how one does think of immaterial concerns at critical moments) that it

was a pity the artist had not studied the real human head a little before attempting a Leonidas on silk.

The irrepressible Naylor must needs get to work with his pen during this half-hour or so. The Spha-kiots looked aslant at him across their great noses, and evidently wondered at his scholarship and his choosing such a time for the display of it. But Naylor remained unperturbed ; nor could De Blessant's remarks and mine distract him, either.

‘There!’ he exclaimed when he had done. ‘If the worst happens, you can tell them at home I died writing. A bit of a fraud, perhaps ; but literature itself is a pretty warm battle, I do assure you.’

The order to proceed was given. We laughed at Naylor, and obeyed it.

Our course was by the base of the cone of the high peak already mentioned. We had to descend a little and then pick our way across a small rugged upland basin of rocks and herbs. This brought us to the corresponding gentle acclivity on the other side. The blockhouse was set with its back to the rocks a little above and beyond—unseen, though so near, but felt by me, if by no one else.

I shall never forget the exciting moments of our final scramble upwards to the level of the fortress. Every instant I looked for a line of red-coats to pop up on the ridge and bowl us over like ninepins. We three were in the van. This was bad enough for me merely as a mountaineer, since the men behind were infinitely more expert climbers, and gave me no mercy. The idea of the easy target practice we should offer was worse.

Thyatis now regulated our every movement scrupulously. He was the first to get his head over the ridge—his bared head and nothing more.

Then, by twos and threes, he brought up his men and set them recumbent on the ground, with their guns levelled. We were well up the slope, and so had the better view of what was being designed. The blockhouse was scarcely thirty paces away, and sufficiently beneath us to be covered by our men in an extraordinarily simple way. It seemed to me that Turkish heedlessness in a campaign could nohow have been better illustrated.

Red-coats were moving to and fro in the restricted courtyard of the building with washing and cooking materials. A bugler began to stretch his lungs. The sunshine gleamed on the barred windows, and a breeze shook the crescented flag that capped this most bleak of abodes. Beyond, however, was the plain of Canea, with its gardens and villages, the dun-coloured capital itself, and the Mediterranean. It was a sublime perch. The cloudless blue heavens seemed almost to press upon our backs.

I made these observations as methodically as if I were a recognised non-combatant. But I was not allowed to continue so calm an occupation. Our left flank body began to show below, creeping towards the strong gate of the blockhouse.

‘Get ready,’ whispered Naylor. ‘They’re bound to spot them.’

It was even so. The blockhouse seethed with hubbub, and the courtyard was crowded with men running about to arm themselves. Then Thyatis gave the word to fire, and our men poured a terrible

volley right into the thick of the Turks. I counted eleven motionless Moslems as the result.

This was the beginning. It seemed to me that we had the foe at a ghastly disadvantage—at any rate, if they were obliged to use the courtyard.

But a different tale had now to be told. From the windows and loopholes on the side that faced our flank body a hot fire was soon being turned on the patriots. Before these could get near the walls they had lost a number of men. Cover there was none for them, and the Moslem marksmanship made Thyatis groan and wrestle with his moustaches.

Worse followed. While our leader was anxiously looking for the appearance of our third body, I was engrossed by the movements of four huge Sphakiots from the attacking party. These between them carried two great sacks of gunpowder. They were protected as much as possible by their comrades. But the latter fell so fast that there was no guessing if they would ever reach their bourne, much less be allowed to place their charge conveniently in position and fire it.

Rockets were being sent up from the blockhouse even while this critical movement was in progress. Thyatis apparently liked the look of the rockets as little as the rest of the enemy's proceedings.

Word at this stage was loudly given to us to fire and advance—as a distraction, I presumed, since there was nothing very obvious for us to attack. A volley rang out against the windows and loopholes, wherever a glint of red showed itself. The Sphakiots can shout, and they did shout; and, under the stimulating

contagion, Naylor and I joined in with the ghost of a British cheer.

A roar of noise checked us—responsive and antagonistic shouts—and after a prodigious explosion, a dense cloud of smoke rose from the spot where I had last seen the brave fellows with the powder. The fatal calamity had happened, as it seemed bound to do. The blockhouse was not destined to fall into our hands, unless we made ladders of each other and could force our way over the walls.

‘By Jove!’ cried Naylor, ‘that looks bad.’

We had all brought up close under the blockhouse, which here seemed as unassailable as Newgate. A rocket-stick dropped oddly between De Blessant and me. It made us laugh, though, Heaven knows, our situation was not an amusing one. There were dead Sphakiots on the slope down which we had come, and dozens of dead and wounded on the left side of the building.

An order to join our forces with these others was obeyed pell-mell. But of what use was it? There we were before a massive, iron-banded door that only a battering-ram or a piece of ordnance could have smashed.

A conviction of mismanagement and failure was upon me. It seemed to be reflected in the stern, angry faces of the patriots.

But an instant later I lost all particular interest in the siege and the Moslems’ resistance to it. Naylor slanted backwards, and his right hand started to his breast.

‘I’ve got it,’ he stammered as he fell.

De Blessant and I gave him all our attention.

There seemed little else for us to do—which, from one aspect, was comforting enough. Between us we carried him under the wall of the blockhouse in the direction whence our other detachment might be expected to come. There was no doctor with the patriots in their death-or-glory enterprise. But the Frenchman said he knew a little about wounds and their treatment.

Ere we could do more, however, than lay the poor fellow on the ground, we were joined by several of the mountaineers, with the word ‘Betrayed!’ on their lips.

A body of Turkish soldiers was making its appearance from below. The rockets were hurrying them forward.

The thought of leaving Naylor was not to be entertained. Nor was it entertained. The mountaineers made slings of their gun-straps, and four of them took the poor fellow between them and started at a great pace down a ravine that sprang from the eastern side of the blockhouse. Our movements were briskened painfully by the singing of bullets about our ears as for a time (brief yet terrible) we again got in range of the Moslem muskets.

Then for hours, as it seemed, we did nothing but speed for our lives, reckless of precipices and aught else, except an increase of the distance between us and the victorious red-coats.

Naylor was alive, and smiled whenever we spoke to him. This sufficed to keep us from halting. He signified, moreover, that we were on no account to stop for him. But it was a miserable business. I had never felt such a coward as I felt during this headlong flight.



Our movements were briskened painfully by the singing of bullets
about our ears.

CHAPTER IV.



IT was noon when our flight ended in a gray, faded settlement, girdled by cliffs save where we had come upon it, and where a narrow defile led from it down to the coast. The church-bell was jingling for some unapparent reason as we reached the dishevelled building itself.

We were soon surrounded by the villagers, agape for intelligence. They received the news of the patriots' reverse in silence—at least the men did; the women wept.

Happily there was an apothecary here. We conveyed Naylor to his house, prepared to hear the worst, for the poor fellow's face told its own tale.

The man wore horn spectacles that gave him an owl-like look. His tedious pedantry was also suggestive of the owl's sham demeanour of exceeding wisdom. De Blessant was worth two of him as a medical man. But neither of them, nor all the physicians in the world, could give Naylor his life-blood again.

'Do stop them bothering about me, old fellow,' he whispered at length. 'I know I'm booked.'

I said what I could to persuade him to think otherwise, and told him we were within a mile or two of the port in which the *Panhellenion* lay.

'Once we get you on board you'll do,' I said, hoping against hope.

The mention of the steamer seemed to brighten him.

‘Are you sure you can get to her?’ he asked.

The apothecary laughed to scorn the idea that one little defeat in the mountains meant the collapse of the insurrection. According to him, it was rather the very thing that was most wanted to make the Christians fight their best. No Turk would dare from the north to invade the southern ravines of the Madara Vouna; and that was the only direction open to them.

‘Then there’s one thing you can do for me,’ Naylor continued, speaking with more and more difficulty as the internal bleeding progressed.

‘Whatever it is, I’ll do it,’ I said.

‘My notes—take them with you. You’ll be returning to England?’

‘As soon as I can—with you.’

He shook his head, smiling again. He knew better than that.

‘Made on the spot, you know, they have value,’ he murmured. ‘You promise?’

I told him I would try to do something more arduous than that if he wished it.

‘There’s nothing else,’ he replied. ‘I’m just a straw in the wind: no wife, brother, sister, or any one. Thank God for it, too!’

We could do nothing but watch over him to the last. There were moments when I should have enjoyed the excitement of defending the apothecary’s house against attack; this patient waiting for the end of a bold, reckless life was so miserable. But no such chance offered. The village was still as the grave, except when the cracked church-bell jangled periodically, and that was worse than the brooding silence.

Once he rallied De Blessant about his inadequacy as a prophet.

‘Oh, but, *mon cher garçon*,’ retorted the Frenchman, ‘who knows? I may follow you soon. I shall revenge you, for one thing. Give me a death like yours a thousand times sooner than on my feather-bed in Paris.’

To which poor Naylor replied almost inaudibly, with a painful attempt to laugh: ‘Bunkum, my dear fellow!’

Towards eight o’clock he breathed his last, making me feel wretchedly alone. Though I had known him but a few days, I had learned to love him as a friend. Almost his last words were an injunction to us not to bother ourselves with his body. The Sphakia churchyard, he said, was good enough for him if it was good enough for the Sphakiots.

And that was what we did with him the following morning. There were graves ready dug in the churchyard—ominous sign!—and in one of them (which the sun shone on more than on the others) we laid him, in the presence of all the village, including several other patriot refugees from Thyatis’s army.

What had become of the bulk of our fighting friends we did not learn until that afternoon. Then we made our way to the coast, and, under guidance, skirted the tremendous spurs of the Madara Vouna until we reached the snug creek in which the *Panhellenion* lay like a nut in its kernel. Here the confusion was bewildering. The patriots made bright patches of colour in the cramped place, and their chatter and declamations raised echoes for the

mountain walls to toy with and cast out (so one fancied) almost to the lazy cruisers in the offing. Some two hundred of them were believed to have been killed ; and, worse still, the wounded had had to be left. Under the circumstances, it seemed small consolation that more Moslems than Christians had come to their end in the affray.

Thyatis was not here when we arrived. But he was looked for every moment. Pending his and the other leaders' coming, the captain of the *Panhellenion* could say nothing about his return (or attempted return, as might be) to the *Ægean*. He had already disembarked the cargo of arms, ammunition, and provisions sent by the insurrectionary agents in Athens, and had ballasted the boat in readiness for his next trip at an hour or two's notice.

De Blessant got his letters.

'I stay here,' he repeated when I asked him if they made him alter his plans. 'I am like *le bon Naylor* ; there is no one except *la petite* to whom I report myself, and she will excuse.'

He was not to be dissuaded. It was the first defeat with which he had been associated in Crete, and his French blood thirsted to avenge it. So he said, and his gallant looks bore out his words. The Sphakiots could have done with a hundred men like him ; and so, perhaps, could Crete.

As for me, I was very uncomfortable. The old business instincts were fidgiting in me. I was wronging my partner and all who depended on us by this misapplication of my time. Moreover (and chiefly, I dare say), I had had quite enough of war, especially this guerilla warfare in the mountains. My

legs were stiff as an old man's with their unwonted exercise.

The captain of the *Panhellenion* could speak a moderate amount of English, and was disposed to be friendly. I was, he said, welcome to sleep on the steamer, so that I might not miss the chance of getting to Greece whenever that presented itself. But he warned me of the new danger I was facing in thus getting aboard a vessel that would be blown to bits by the first Turkish gunboat that got the opportunity. Of this, however, I took small heed. Merely on the balance of risks, the *Panhellenion* was the thing for me; and, besides, from the twinkle in the captain's eye, I surmised that the patriot ship was not to be overtaken by any ordinary cruiser of the Sultan's fleet.

The rest of that day was spent amid the babble of the insurgents. De Blessant and I both agreed that they were even better at talking than fighting. But they need not have quarrelled among themselves as they did. This seemed to be the worst portent of all as to the final issue of the revolt.

Thyatis was expected hourly, but he did not show until the next day. Then he appeared, haggard, fierce, with a bandaged arm, and a 'do-or-die' demeanour that was not encouraging. The Turks had so far been content to establish themselves securely in two of the blockhouses. Their aim, he said, was to get some light artillery up from the plain. Until that was done they would not venture on aggressive movements to the south.

So far well.

This news, and the knowledge that there were still

thousands of fighting Sphakiots left, restored the spirits of the warriors by the seaboard. Whatever else had happened to Thyatis, he had not lost energy, and in a few hours his influence invigorated the tone of the place. The *Panhellenion's* cargo was very welcome, and the letters from Athens about future supplies were also favourable.

As the upshot, it was decided that, weather and the situation of the cruisers permitting, the *Panhellenion* should be off that night; and so I prepared to look my last at Crete—if not for ever, at least for a very long time. I had, of course, resisted Thyatis's warm invitation to continue with him and his men. Even for the moral encouragement's sake I did not think it worth while to offer myself as a sacrifice to the Sphakiots, like poor Naylor.

The cruisers somehow seemed to have got an inkling of what was in the wind. As the day waned they stood closer inshore than hitherto, and, either for pastime or a menace, fired big guns landwards. Probably the victorious Moslems above had found a means of signalling their news to them, and this had momentarily inspirited the lethargic admiral who was in charge of the blockade.

'It is nothing,' said Thyatis, with a contemptuous upheaval of his nostrils, when I mentioned the firing and hoped it did not imply increased vigilance. 'We might run under their noses and they would not see us.'

But I was not so sure. The highlander's temperament was of too unreasonably sanguine a kind to fit well into what I suppose I may call my British prudence.

There was a young moon this night. The thing was pretty to see, in combination with the silvery rippling and throbbing of the Mediterranean and the stupendous dark mountain wall at our backs. But I would rather not have seen it. The young thing would grow in size and luminosity every day, and thus the loss of each opportunity of getting out of Crete would add to the probability of our not getting out of it at all.

But such thoughts were not to be encouraged. The *Panhellenion's* furnace fires were already glowing, and when the captain gave the word, it only remained for the engineers to let us loose. Eleven o'clock was the time fixed for the start. Once again my pulse began to rise as this hour drew near.

I had but to shake hands with Thyatis and De Blessant and wish them 'God-speed' in their enterprises.

The former humiliated me by thanking me for what I had done for the cause: he did it with his old exuberance of speech and earnestness; and he ended by entreating me to try to interest the British Government on the patriots' behalf. I made no rash promises.

'Adieu, *mon ami*, *et bon voyage*,' said De Blessant when we had drunk to each other; 'we shall meet in Paris some day, and you shall see me *décoré* by the Cretan Republic.'

'Yes,' added Thyatis, 'that will be it—remember.'

I am still remembering. But there is no Cretan Republic, and therefore no decoration for Gaston de Blessant, whom, besides, I have not seen since. He may be dead, like Naylor; or he may be the sage,

corpulent father of two well-grown children, and the husband of a discreet wife in the Chaussée d'Antin or elsewhere, for all I know to the contrary. The enthusiasms of youth die with one's youth—very properly, no doubt.

We were on the point of starting, when there was a cry to stop. A little boat pushed off with three men in it and two rowers. Our passenger list was to be increased by these three. I watched them come aboard, and suddenly my heart became agitated as I recognised the venerable beard of Nicolopoulos. Yes, it was he, unmistakably. I went up to him, held out my hand, and said I was glad to see him. But I was really nothing of the kind. It would have been very different had his daughter been with him. Alone, however, bound for Athens at such a time, and that beautiful girl left by herself in a land like Crete!

He said 'Good-evening' in Greek mechanically as he just touched my palm.

The *Panhellenion* began to move. There were subdued shouts of goodwill toward us as we stole darkly towards the rocky mouth of our haven. Not a light was allowed on board to give the least hint of us to the cruisers.

Nicolopoulos was about to lose himself in the throng on deck, when I checked him. I was impressed by a sort of hang-dog expression on his face seen in the starlight. Also, I was sure he had not recognised me.

'Forgive me,' I said, 'but has anything happened?'

Now he seemed to realise that it was English, not Greek, that was spoken. He looked at me. I do

not want to see a look like that again on any man's face.

'Oh,' he said hesitatingly, with a bitter smile, 'it is you, Mr Graham. So we are to be fellow-passengers ! It is well.'

'What is wrong ?' I urged. 'Is *anything* the matter ?'

'The matter ! Yes, much, sir. They have taken my daughter from me. She is condemned. She is a leper, like her mother. Gracious Heaven ! I knew it was in her ; but I loved her so much. The demons ! It is because I hate the Government. That is what is the matter, Mr Graham. I wish to see the captain.'

Helena a leper, and cast out into that settlement of pitiable misery, that place of horror ! Nicolopoulos's words seemed to blast me as her seizure must have blasted him. I sat on a heap of rope, and could think of nothing else as we sped rapidly along, hugging the shore, with hardly a whisper on board.

I did not go to bed that night. Somehow, too, I did not feel as glad as I ought to have felt when the captain came among us and told me, as well as the rest, that the worst risks were over. It must have been two o'clock in the morning then.

With Nicolopoulos I did not exchange another word. What could I say ? But I felt for him deeply, unforgetably.

We reached Athens in the evening, and all was well. A week later I was in London, considerably browner than when I had left Victoria Station

some five weeks earlier, and considerably more experienced.

A few dried rose-leaves are now all the visible remembrances I possess of my stirring week in beautiful and still unhappy Crete.

I fulfilled poor Naylor's request. His 'copy' was printed and read; but it would have been better appreciated if the readers could have known him as I had. After all, perhaps, he was not greatly to be pitied. He might have died in a worse cause than that of Cretan freedom; hit in front, too.

THE GOLD SNUFF-BOX.

AN OLD SOLDIER'S STORY.

BY ANDREW W. ARNOLD.

CHAPTER I.

YES,' said the old major as he filled his pipe from a very beautiful gold snuff-box, 'it's not a bad box, and it's got a history, too; for, in a way, I got my wife and I got my fortune through that little article; though,' he added, with a chuckle, 'I reckon I should have got the former anyhow, as Catharine was as true as steel. But throw another log on, and I will tell you all about it.

'It was on the 18th of October 1813, the third and last day of the battle of Leipzig, that we Hussars were waiting in reserve behind some houses in the rear of the suburb of Connewitz. With the idea of getting between Poniatowsky on the extreme right and Victor on the left of the centre, the Austrians had three times assaulted and taken that place, and three times we had driven them out of it, thanks chiefly to Marshal Oudinot, who had brought up the Young Guard, which had been in reserve at Probstheida. The white-coats, finding all their efforts

useless, had now commenced to pound the houses with shot and shell in the hope of bringing them about our ears or setting the place on fire. Behind us, from the towers and steeples of Leipzig, the inhabitants were watching the fluctuating fortunes of the battle; in fact, they were better able to judge of what was going on than we soldiers were.

‘Unfortunately Poniatowsky and his Poles had lost Dolitz on the 16th, and this enabled the enemy to place a battery in what was for us a very awkward position, whence they could drop shell after shell (which they did with remarkable accuracy) into the village.

‘It was getting towards dusk when we received orders to take this battery that was causing so much harm. The low-lying ground between the Elster and the Pliesse, in consequence of recent floods, was little better than a morass, and worse ground for a cavalry charge could hardly be found.

‘“We are in for the devil’s own game now,” muttered my old comrade, Lendrier. I thought so too, but said nothing; yet I have often thought of his words since; for, alas! as far as he was concerned, they came only too true.

‘We had hardly emerged from the village and got into the open than we were exposed to a murderous cross-fire, to say nothing of our being just within musket-range of those in the houses at Dolitz. Owing to the swampy nature of the ground, it was impossible for the horses to get into their stride. The front ranks were simply mowed down; men and horses fell in heaps, and that threw the whole mass into confusion. Veterans as most of the men were, they

could not stand such a fire, and many were about to fly when an aide-de-camp tore up. I recognised him at once, for it was General Corbineau himself, aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

“Who is in command here?” he roared.

“I had seen the *chef d’escadron* reel in his saddle two minutes before, and the senior major was lying at my feet. I was senior captain, though I was taking the junior major’s place then.

“I am,” I answered.

“Turning to the men, in a gentler tone he shouted, “Courage, *mes enfants*; the Emperor is watching you. You see that battery: you must take it. There are five guns. There will be five crosses for you. *Allons, follow me!*”

“The men rallied, and, forming up, we dashed forward, floundering through a regular bog. We were but two hundred metres now from the guns, when, just as we were ascending to cross a road, which was slightly higher than the surrounding field, a ball struck my horse full in the chest, throwing me with terrible force on the hard ground. I remember nothing more; but when I came to my senses the moon was shining brightly, though ever and anon its bright beams were obscured by the clouds that scurried across the sky, for the storm that had been raging was slowly dying away. I had received a wound in the head in falling, and my hair was stiff with the clotted blood. Every bone in my body ached, but luckily none was broken. I had a flask, which was nearly half-full, and after I had taken some of the spirit it contained I felt somewhat revived; so, wrapping my long cloak around me, I

resolved to wait where I was till the morning. I was half-asleep and half-awake when I heard voices behind me. I was lying against my dead horse. Looking up cautiously, I saw two of those cowardly scoundrels who follow every army; they generally make a pretence of being sutlers, and, keeping out of the way while any fighting is going on, come out at night and rob the dead, and if necessary do not hesitate to murder the wounded. The sight of these rascals quickly roused me. I knew only too well I should receive no mercy from them. I would as soon have fallen into the hands of Blücher's butchers as into theirs, so I quietly drew my pistols from the holsters and resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible. The two thieves were so intent at that moment taking all the valuables from a corpse that they had no idea of my vicinity.

'About ten paces off lay the body of one of our men. I had no idea then who the man was. Catching sight of it, the rascals approached the body. As they stooped over the supposed corpse I heard one of them say to the other that the man was still breathing.

"Give him the knife, quick!" replied the other.

'I saw the bright blade quiver in the moonlight; but ere it descended the silence of the night was broken by the sharp report of my pistol, and with a bullet through his heart the would-be murderer fell prostrate across the body of his intended victim. The other, taken by surprise, stood motionless for a moment; then his eye fell on me, and he had half-drawn a pistol from his breast when I gave him the contents of my other weapon in his stomach, and he fell groaning and writhing on the ground. Rising

with some difficulty—for I felt shaken and weak, and every movement gave me horrible pain—I went to the assistance of the wounded soldier. To my surprise, I found it was poor Lendrier. What made it worse, too, was that he had only just been made a captain the week before. Like myself, he had risen from the ranks, and we had served through many a campaign; but I saw as I poured some spirit down his throat that this one would be his last. He was one of the bravest men I ever met, but at the same time of a very reserved and taciturn disposition. Wine never unlocked his tongue. His one idea was to rise in the service that he might have better chances of looting. I believe he came from Auvergne; but if he had any relatives he never spoke of them.

“It’s all up, Valbach; I am done for,” he said bitterly, in a low, weak voice. “This is not the first good turn you have done me, and now I will do you one. Feel in my pocket, and you will find a gold snuff-box.” I did as he directed me, and took out the very box you see before you. In it was a piece of parchment, and by the light of the moon, which was now shining brilliantly, I saw a rough sketch and some figures; but the document would have meant nothing to me had not the poor fellow explained its meaning. “I will tell you what it amounts to,” he said. “Exactly twenty paces due south—that is, behind the first Calvary* you come to—about a league and a half from Grien, which is about

* These crosses, erected at the side of the road on the spot where a man has been murdered, are generally found in very desolate places.

six leagues from Linz, on the high-road to Vienna, at the foot of a young beech-tree, you will find a box, the contents of which will make you a rich man. The tree has carved on it an 'I,' which stands for '*Ici*.' About a foot from the stem of the tree farthest from the road, under the leaves, is a large stone, and under that you will find it. Now," he concluded, "I have given you the key, and you ought to be able to unlock the door."

'Talking had made him so weak that I went to the corpse of the man I had shot beside him to see if I could find a flask upon it, as I had given him all the spirit I had got. Putting my hand in one of the pockets of the rascal, I found it was full of watches and rings—some of them, I found afterwards, of great value—and also many gold and silver coins, and, luckily, a flask. For a time this spirit kept my poor comrade alive; but as the moon was sinking in the west he gradually sank, in spite of all I could do, and passed away unconsciously.

'I then commenced to search more thoroughly the bodies of the two rogues. One, I found, was still alive, and on my touching him he fought most viciously, till I gave him a blow on the head with the butt-end of my pistol. Round the fellow's waist I found a leather belt simply stuffed with gold and notes to the value of many thousand francs. The man, as he lay unconscious in the moonlight, looked like a little Polish Jew. A more villainous countenance I had seldom seen, and I considered that in clearing the earth—as I thought—of him, I had conferred a benefit on humanity as well as on myself.

'Now I must tell you that when I had returned

to my native village in Alsace five years ago, Catharine Ketzler, the beautiful daughter of Carl Ketzler the miller, had promised to marry me. She was seventeen then, and the acknowledged belle not only of the village but of the whole country-side. So, as I sat and waited for the long night to end, you may imagine what thoughts came into my head, now that I found myself possessed of so much wealth, to say nothing of the treasure that I might find near Linz. For once in my life I hoped that the war might soon cease. My one desire hitherto had been to gain the gold epaulets of a colonel, but now I cared nothing for them. Let me only get back safely to my beloved Alsace, and I should be content. What a nice little farm I would buy! What fine cows and chickens Catharine should have to look after! These bright dreams really seemed to do me good; and when the dawn broke, after a good meal—for the man I had shot had a large bag of victuals on him—I had strength enough, though still very weak, to catch a horse that was quietly browsing near. As I turned to go away I took one last glance at poor Lendrier; and I was rather surprised to see that the rogue I thought I had disabled had taken his departure. However, I cannot say that I paid very much attention to that fact then; but, as it happened, I had not seen the last of him, as you will hear.

‘A dense, cold fog overhung the landscape. I had no idea how the fortune of war had gone. We might be victors or we might not. I could hear in the distance the sound of military movements in the town behind; but all was quiet opposite, in the Austrian lines. I had meant to make my way over

the stone bridge at Leipzig to my headquarters, when suddenly I was startled by several loud explosions coming from the city itself. I knew at once that our parks of artillery were being blown up. A sillier thing to have done could hardly be imagined. It told all the world that we were about to retreat, and gave our enemies fresh courage. Had the ammunition been thrown into the river, they would have known nothing about our intentions for some time, as the fog prevented them from seeing what was going on, and many more of our men might consequently have escaped. Luckily I espied a small foot-bridge leading to a mill; and, taking my horse over it, I succeeded in getting into the main column of retreat on the Lindenau Road. Apart from Oudinot's corps of the Guard, who surrounded the Emperor, the whole army was a mere disorganised rabble, and as we retreated the houses were pillaged and the people ill-treated. I should not have thought so much of this had it not been that, when a few months later the allies entered our own dear country, they more than followed our example. I had gone a league, when, in our rear, I heard another explosion. This was the bridge of Leipzig, our only line of retreat, being destroyed; and as that was done while thousands of our men were on the other side, those unfortunates were either compelled to fight for their lives in the burning houses or swim the river. Prince Poniatowsky in trying to do so was drowned, and Marshal MacDonald only just escaped the same fate. But there is no need to tell you of the horrors of the retreat to the Rhine, or of the glorious but disastrous campaign of 1814, which ended in the following

March. Suffice it to say that it was not till the middle of the following November that I, with the half-pay of a captain and the brevet rank of a major, was able to leave Tours, where my regiment was quartered, and set off for my native village.'

CHAPTER II.

 I was getting dusk, and the last red rays of the setting sun were shining on the vane of the little church, half-hidden in the trees, as I approached my old home. The cock which surmounted the steeple shone out, indeed, like molten gold. This bird, I may tell you, showed that the inhabitants of the village were Protestants, the Roman Catholic hamlets having a cross on the church to distinguish them. Soon I found myself within sight of the ivy-clad cottage where I was born, and where my brother now lived. It was at the top of the steep little street close by the church. Joseph was a blacksmith, like his father before him; and round the smithy door, as I approached, I saw the children just out of school watching the bright sparks fly up from a shoe he was making for a horse patiently waiting within.

"What! Jacques?" he exclaimed as he rushed out to greet me. "Can it really be you?"

"Yes," I answered; "and I shall have plenty to tell you to-night; but I am off to the mill now to see Catharine."

“The sooner you go, then, the better,” he replied, “for young Strellmann, the son of the tanner at Hagenau, goes up there pretty often. You know what a miser Ketzler’s wife is. She wants Catharine to marry that fellow, for he has got money.”

‘I did not stay to hear more, though I was angered by what my brother told me, and I resolved to make the tanner’s son pay dearly for his audacity if I met him; for I had no doubt of Catharine’s constancy.

‘The very ground I trod on reassured me; for, passing through a wood, I came into the self-same field in which we plighted our troth. It was bleak and bare now; but, ah! how different it was then, on that bright summer day, with the bees humming, and when the brook that turned the mill was sparkling in the sun! I had just returned from Spain then, as brown as a berry, with the rank of a *maréchal des logis-en-chef* (troop sergeant-major), and a couple of medals on my breast and a sword of honour at my side; and I can tell you that I thought fairly well of myself.

‘It was harvest-time, and Carl Ketzler, who had a small farm as well as the mill, found that, as so many of the young fellows were away at the wars, it was difficult to get hands to help him to get his corn in. I willingly offered my services, though that was more with an eye to being near his daughter than for his material benefit. I could ride for hours under a hot Spanish sun without fatigue; but this reaping, I soon found, was regular back-breaking work, and rather more than I bargained for. However, I cut and Catharine tied, and we two were very happy together.

“Come, Jacques,” said she, “I am tired now. Let us rest a little.”

‘So I made up a stook under a lime-tree. In the valley beneath us we faintly heard the rhythmical clack of the mill and the tumble of the water, and now and again we caught a glimpse of the bright back of the kingfisher as he flashed along the stream. In the distance the sheep-bells tinkled, the birds sang gaily overhead, and the *ordenbands* (striped butterflies) fluttered around us. The scent of the lime, the beautiful prospect, and the presence of the lovely girl beside me filled my heart with love and happiness—I was even too happy to speak; but Catharine, who had gathered a large bouquet of flowers, and sat with them in her lap, at length broke the silence.

“Jacques,” said she merrily, with a roguish twinkle in her eyes, “I’m going to make a wreath.”

“And very well you will do it,” said I.

“Now, don’t you love these pretty flowers?”

“Of course I do,” I answered. “I love the poppies, for they are like your lips; I love the marguerites, for they are as white as your arms; and the *kaiserblumen* are only equalled by your eyes. Why not,” I added, taking up some corn—“why not mix this with them, to match your silky, flaxen hair?”

“Oh! I will if you like,” she answered demurely.

“You are a good girl,” I replied, “to do what I wish you. Now, tell me, Catharine,” I continued, getting bolder, “will you do something else I want you to do—say, *ma cherie*, will you marry me?”

‘She blushed and drew back a little, eying me shyly—ay, doubtfully—all the time.

“You really mean it?” she said nervously, for all her natural gaiety and coquetries had suddenly gone.

“Of course I do,” I replied. As our lips were very close, somehow they met; but, alas! they quickly parted, for coming up the hill we saw her mother. We had our fright for nothing, however, for she, as it happened, never saw us. The miller quite agreed to our betrothal; but his wife did not at first see it in the same way, as she said she had no faith in *les militaires*. But when I gave her a valuable watch (for we soldiers did not go campaigning in those days for nothing) she at last consented.

‘I recalled all this when I saw the mill before me, and quickened my pace at the thought of beholding the lovely girl again. Just as I passed the stable I heard my Catharine’s sweet voice within, softly singing to herself. Darting into a shed—for I meant to surprise her—I looked through a chink to see what she was doing. Ah, what a pretty picture she presented! She had evidently gone there to get some food for her chickens. She was seated on the edge of a bin, delving her white, plump arm into the oats, and letting them trickle slowly through her fingers. Any one who has done this knows what a pleasant sensation it is. The light of the lantern above fell on the black Alsatian bow, which showed up in a striking way her flaxen hair, bound in two tails and almost reaching to her waist. As she bent over, the fine contour of her figure showed how much she had grown since I had seen her. At her feet, rubbing itself against her green kirtle with its red border—

for this was the dress in the Protestant villages, just as the women wore red petticoats with a green border in the Roman Catholic ones—was a fine black cat, which, having caught a huge rat, had brought it to show her.

“Ah, Mimi!” she said sadly, “when will my Jacques come back? He is a long time—isn’t he? But it’s getting late now, and you want your supper, don’t you? Well”——

“I must have made some movement, for she sprang up and stood still for a moment, her lips parted in an attitude of attention. I could wait no longer. Rushing across, I met her at the door.

“Your Jacques has come, you see, my darling!” I exclaimed, and in another moment my arms were round her neck. She was so taken by surprise that for a time she could do nothing but return the kisses I showered upon her.

“Oh Jacques!” she cried as soon as she could find words to speak, “can it really be you? And what are you?” she continued as she stroked my major’s gold demi-epaulet!

“A major, my lass.”

“A major!” she answered, looking up lovingly into my eyes; “and will you really marry me, a poor miller’s daughter?”

“Of course I will, my lass; if I were a general of division I would, and should think myself lucky. But what is this I hear of young Strellmann? If I come across him I will put a bullet in him as sure as I stand here.”

“Mother wants me to have him. She says he is rich,” she answered. “But you need not fear;

nothing would make me take him, even if you had not come."

"The valuables and notes which I had taken from the two wretches on the last night of the battle of Leipzig had realised nearly twenty-five thousand francs, and I had the bulk of that in my pocket. We had withdrawn into the stable.

"Oh, he is rich, is he? Has he got many notes like this?" I said, as I showed her a handful of notes for a thousand francs each.

"Oh Jacques!" Then I heard the miller's wife calling her daughter.

"You wait here a moment," I said to Catharine, "and I will go to your mother."

"It happens very often that when a *maréchal des logis-en-chef* receives a commission he is transferred to another regiment. I had been originally in the Chasseurs, so when I approached the miller's wife I saw at once she did not recognise me as an Hussar. In fact, as I came up the village no one had known me.

"And what may be your service, sir?" she said, with a very low curtsy, as she gazed in wonder at my sky-blue uniform and fur-trimmed dolman, and the medals on my breast.

"Before I could answer, the miller, who looked stouter and more jovial than ever, came out.

"And what can I do for you, sir?" he said.

"What can you do?" I answered somewhat warmly. "Why, give me your daughter as you promised. Was it fair to allow other fellows to make love to her while I was fighting for my country?"

“Why, wife,” exclaimed the worthy man, “by my faith, it is Jacques Valbach!”

‘Never shall I forget the look of astonishment on the face of his spouse. She was a little, shrewd, cunning woman, who ruled her easy-going, good-natured husband with a rod of iron. I did not know his real character so well then, and I, with all the world, pitied him; but I think now that the miller never did a better thing than when he married her, for she, in spite of her nagging tongue, was hard-working and thrifty, and without her he would have spent all his gains down at the “Fleur-de-Lis.”

‘Just then Catharine came out, and before their faces I kissed her as though she were already mine. Her mother, with her natural sharpness, took in the situation at once. A major for a son-in-law was a very different thing from a *maréchal des logis*.

“Come now,” she said, “and let bygones be bygones. Young Strellmann,” she continued when we were seated round the table with plenty of beer in front of us, “has not got such gay plumage as you; but I quite agree now to your marrying Catharine. At the same time, he’s a decent young fellow, and what’s more, he has got money.”

“Has he got more than that?” I replied, taking the notes from my pocket. “There’s twenty odd thousand francs, and I think I know where to get more.”

‘The little woman was too astounded to speak, and gazed at the papers with a sort of awe that was perfectly laughable, for never in all her life had she seen such a sum before.

““Jacques Valbach,” she answered emphatically, “Catharine is yours.”

““Very well,” I replied. “Now, as I am one of the family, I will tell you how I got this money.” Then I related what had taken place, and also gave them some information about the hidden treasure; but I did not tell them too much, as I knew the truth of a proverb I had heard in Spain: “A secret between two is God’s secret; but a secret between three is all the world’s.”

‘The miller’s wife was so excited by what little I did say that she actually wished me to start the very next day; but as I had determined to take high ground from the very first, I bluntly told her she might order her husband about as much as she liked, but as I had not seen Catharine for five years, I had no intention of going till it suited my convenience. Before I returned in the evening to my brother, I made Ketzler write a letter to my rival informing him of Catharine’s betrothal; and I added a post-script telling him I could hit a bird on the wing with a pistol. He took the hint, and three months afterwards consoled himself by marrying a girl in his own district.

‘The miller, at the suggestion, I believe, of his wife, proposed that when I went in quest of the hidden treasure he should go with me. I very stupidly consented. I liked him, and thought he would be a pleasant companion, as indeed he was; but had I had the slightest suspicion of his drinking habits—and he certainly never showed them when his wife was near—I would never have agreed to his accompanying me.’

CHAPTER III.

T was on a bright winter's day that we set off. Jacob, the miller's eldest son, a dull, stupid fellow, drove us down in a *leiterwagen* to Strasburg, where Ketzler had a brother named Frederick, who was a well-to-do brewer and maltster.

‘Though in appearance very much alike, the two brothers were very different men. Frederick, it is true, had the same jovial disposition; but for all that, he was uncommonly shrewd and clever, and had amassed a good deal of money. His wife was dead, and he had no children, and it was an everlasting puzzle to the miller's scheming wife what he would do with his property. The brewer was evidently delighted to see his brother, and he was also very nice to me. He gave us a good dinner, and brought out his finest wines. The way these brothers drank certainly astonished me. I can carry a fair amount myself, but I should soon have been under the table had I taken half as much as they did. Having got our passports—and as regards mine, I bribed the official to omit my military title, as French officers were not beloved on the other side of the Rhine in those days—we set out the next day in high spirits.

‘I could not have wished for a pleasanter companion than my future father-in-law. He seemed altogether a different man now. He was so hen-pecked at home that he was more like a boy out of school; and this journey to him, who had never been farther from his village than Strasburg, was quite a

great undertaking. He laughed and joked at everything, and was as happy as the day was long. The only thing that troubled me was the amount of wine and beer he consumed; this loosened his tongue far more than I liked, and I had to speak seriously to him about it.

‘It is a good hundred leagues from Strasburg to Linz, and I purposed going *viâ* Tübingen, Augsburg, Munich, and Brunau to that place. The miller luckily had a married sister at a place named Molke, no great distance from Linz, and we made out, when any questions were asked, that we were going to see her. To avoid suspicion, we travelled in a leisurely way by any diligences we could get. All went well till we got to Munich, where we put up at the “Erzherzog Carl.” It happened that I was chatting to the landlord one evening, when I heard the miller, who had had quite enough wine, talking in an excited way in the next room. Looking through a glass partition, I saw a little, dark, cunning-looking Jew, and a great, hulking, red-headed man seated at a table with him. They were so engrossed listening to Ketzler that they did not notice me. I quickly went to see what was going on; but on my appearance the conversation suddenly ceased. The men exchanged knowing glances, and the miller, looking very sheepish and stupid, got up.

“‘It’s time to go to bed,” I said as he followed me out of the room.

“‘What have you been telling those two fellows?” I asked sharply. “They look a couple of arrant rogues.”

“‘They’ve come from Baden-Baden, where I don’t

think they have won much," he answered, evading the question.

"Never mind that. What have you told them?"

"After a good deal of shuffling he admitted he had told them far more than he ought.

"*Donnerwetter!*" I exclaimed angrily, "and have you told them where we are going?"

"I said we were going on to Brunau to-morrow; but nothing more, for I don't know myself."

"This was true, and I thanked my stars that I had not let him know.

"Very well then, to-morrow, instead of starting at eight, we will go at six in a special post-chaise;" and I went out and told the landlord.

"No sooner were we out of the town the next morning than, instead of going on to Brunau, we made a long detour, and avoiding that town, went on to Linz, where we arrived a day later than we should have done. By this manœuvre I considered I had given the two inquisitive rogues the slip, and was easier in my mind in consequence. My companion had little money of his own; so, as I paid for everything, I took very good care from that time that he had enough wine, but no more.

"We put up in Linz at the "Goldener Adler," and I set about in a diplomatic way to find out from the landlord something about the country. Grien, I found out, was nearly eight leagues from Linz, which was farther than I expected. I also gathered from him that farther on, on a hill, was a very celebrated shrine, called "Maria Taferl," and that many thousands of pilgrims went there annually, more especially in September.

‘There were also, he told me, several shrines and Calvaries on the road, at the side of the Danube. Now, all this agreed with what my poor dying comrade had told me, and you may imagine my delight at hearing it corroborated by my host. It was as much as I could do to hide my emotion. I told the landlord about going to see the sister of my companion, and ordered a trap and a good horse for the morning, leaving a deposit for it with him, as I was not sure when I should come back, the fact being that I could not make up my mind whether to return by the same route or not.

‘A few hours would now decide the great question as to whether I should find the hidden treasure or not, and it made me so excited that I hardly slept a wink all night. Carl Ketzler was equally affected.

‘We started at eight the next morning. It was a bright, clear day, and the noble river sparkled in the sun; but the lovely scenery had no charm for us. The Danube might have been a ditch for all that we cared. The road skirting the river, of course, was mostly level, and we travelled very easily—in fact at such a pace that we got to Grien at half-past ten.

‘After leaving that place we reduced our speed. Neither of us spoke; we were far too agitated for that. With straining eyes we gazed in front, looking for the Calvary.

‘“We must have come a league from Grien now,” exclaimed the miller; “and see! there’s a wood,” he continued as we turned a corner of the road. “*Ma foi!* it’s a lonely, desolate part this—just the place to murder a man in.”

‘We were going at a walking pace, when, after

crossing a bridge over a stream that ran into the river, we suddenly saw, a little way back from the road, in front of a forest of beech-trees, a high cross with the figure of the Saviour on it, and a lamp burning in front.

“Here we are,” we both exclaimed at once. “This must be the place.”

‘I trembled all over with excitement. I carried a very strong stick with a knob on it. Before I left I had got my brother to make me a spade that I could screw the stick into. Making sure there was no one in sight, I sprang out of the cart.

“Now,” I said to Ketzler, as I did not want an empty trap to be seen standing about, “you drive on and come back in ten minutes.”

‘Entering the beech-wood with feverish steps, I counted twenty paces—“*Une, deux, trois, . . . dix-neuf, vingt!*” and then commenced carefully to examine every tree. Soon my eye fell on the right one. There was no doubt about it. The “I” for “*Ici*” was still visible about a metre and a half from the ground. I looked carefully round. There was not a soul to be seen; the stillness was only broken by the thumping of my own heart and the harsh notes of two jays above me. Bending down and removing the leaves, I soon found a large stone, which I quickly removed. Like one possessed, I began to dig, and very soon struck something hard, and in another minute I had the box, which was rather more than a foot square, in my possession. For a moment I stood dazed with delight; but I was soon brought to my senses by the slow, heavy rumbling of an approaching wagon. Hugging the box, I hastily retreated farther into the wood, and, crouching

down, waited for it to pass. *Parbleu!* what a time it seemed! I could have kicked the clown as I heard him talking to his horses; but at last all was quiet again, and I began to examine the box. It was made of oak and rather rotten, but so securely locked that it was only by the aid of my spade that I could wrench it open. To my surprise, as it was so heavy, I found it was full of mouldy morocco cases instead of gold, as I expected; and a faint shiver of disappointment went down my back. But that soon passed away as I opened one of the largest of these.

‘I was no judge of diamonds; but when I saw it contained a magnificent tiara, necklace, and earrings of these glittering gems, for the moment the sight fairly took my breath away. I was so overcome by delight that I could do nothing, and continued to gaze rapturously at my *trouvaille*, when I heard the miller in a cautious tone asking me how I was getting on and what luck I had had. I told him to wait and then I would come, and thereupon commenced opening the other cases, which contained bracelets, rings, &c. One of these bracelets, composed of pearls and rubies, was especially fine; and as for the jewelled snuff-boxes, I never saw anything like them. Fully half the box was taken up with gold coins, chiefly Austrian gold ducats and napoleons. I may add that these latter amounted altogether to eight thousand francs. Taking the jewels from their cases, I quickly transferred them to the belt I had taken from the Jew at Leipzig. I was too excited to take much care, and I stuffed them in anyhow; if the stones came out I could not help it. Then, replacing the cases, I carried the box to the carriage. The

worthy miller was simply beside himself with delight when he saw the gold.

“I have got a few jewels too,” I said casually, as I did not wish him to know too much. But the shining coins were quite enough for him, and he slapped me on the back with pleasure. If I had had any idea of returning by a different way, it had all vanished now. All my caution left me. Come what might, I determined to get back to Strasburg as fast as ever I could, though of course I did not mean to attract attention by undue haste. I meant to go to Strasburg because I had really no idea of the value of the stones, and I thought that perhaps Frederick Ketzler, with his knowledge of business, might know something about their value. I knew an Israelite at Frankfort to whom I would offer them; but I thought there was no harm in getting the brewer’s advice first.

“Now,” I said to the miller as we hurriedly drove back, “you only keep your tongue still for a few days, till we are across the Rhine.” And it is only fair to say he took my counsel.

‘The landlord was evidently surprised to see us back so soon; but we told him the person we wished to see had gone away no one knew whither, and that consequently we should leave early the next day.

‘With so many valuables in our possession, it behoved us to be more cautious than ever. As for me, I looked with suspicion on every one I met, and I rarely spoke to a single person if I could avoid doing so. We had been favoured by fair weather hitherto; but the next morning, when we left Linz, a cold rain came on, which turned to snow; and by the evening the whole landscape was covered with a thick white

mantle. This, however, did not damp our spirits; it reminded us that soon Christmas would come, and that is always a great festival in Alsace.

‘For more than twenty years there had been incessant wars on the Continent. These had now ceased. Thus it came to pass that many men who had led roving, reckless lives during that time had nothing to do. They could not at first settle down to a quiet life, so that numbers of rogues and vagabonds were about the country, and they infested the high-roads. This made the police on the frontiers very careful. However, all went well with us; our passports were in order, and they gave us no trouble. We had passed through Munich and Augsburg, and the next frontier would be that of our own beloved France; so when we had left Augsburg behind us our anxiety lessened, and we innocently thought we were practically out of the wood.’

CHAPTER IV.

T was on a bitterly cold, frosty evening that we arrived at the “Silber Glocke” at Tübingen, a post-house celebrated for its white wines and pancakes. The proprietor was a model landlord, who did everything to make his guests comfortable. Strasburg was not fifteen leagues off—our journey, we considered, was now ended—so you can judge what high spirits we were in. The landlord, who remembered that we had put up there

before, welcomed us warmly; and the pretty face of Gretchen the chambermaid—who reminded me of Catharine, and whose beauty had induced me to give her a memento three times as much as I should have done had she been plain—beamed with pleasure when she saw us. I was shown up to the best room immediately over the porch in the centre of the house, the miller having the next one on my right. It was a small inn, with only three rooms overlooking the street, though there were wings at the side. I mention these particulars that you may understand better what followed.

‘I was in my room when I was startled by a post-chaise tearing up. I thought some couple had eloped by the manner it stopped, and looked out to see what was the matter.

“‘Here, I say!’” shouted a voice to the ostler, which I recognised as that of the little Jew I had seen at Augsburg, “has a young fair-haired fellow and a middle-aged man from Augsburg arrived here to-night?”

‘On the man answering in the affirmative, the Israelite, with the same hulking man I had seen before, quickly descended.

“‘*Ma foi!* we are in for it now,” I muttered, and I went to inform the miller. I had not given him credit for much courage, but I did not think he would have been so alarmed as he was.

“‘Let’s have the horses out again and make for Strasburg,” he said nervously. “Whatever shall we do?”

‘I saw at once I must rely on myself.

“‘Listen to me,” I said savagely. “We are in this

dilemma through your babbling, and we shall only get out of it by keeping our heads. We should gain nothing by going. It would excite suspicion, and of course these men could and would follow. It's not these two rogues I fear so much as the police. Suppose they did follow us, and I shot them both. I should have to answer many awkward questions. I should be searched, everything would come out, and I should lose all. I cannot tell what they really know; but they must know something, or they would not come after us. If I wounded them, out of spite they would inform the police. No; we must be guided entirely by circumstances. Leave everything to me."

"I had gone into the miller's room, and now returned to my own. The two men had come up and taken the chamber on my left. The walls were very thin, and I could easily hear them speaking, though they spoke in a low tone.

"We have got those two fellows at last," said the little Jew. "It's our last chance, too; they would have been in France by to-morrow."

"Yes, Moses, you are a clever boy. Whatever they have got, it must be worth something, or they would not have travelled at such a pace."

"I will just try that door," said his companion, and as he spoke he gently tried to open it. "No, it is locked from the other side," he continued. "When we see them safely at the supper-table I will come up and see to that. I understand locks."

"I had been standing still all this time, and I remained so till they went down; and very soon we followed them, having taken very good care to place

everything of value in our pockets. The two rogues had evidently made up their minds to be very agreeable, for when we entered the *salle à manger*, where they were seated at a long table with several other guests, they both rose when they saw us.

“I think,” said Moses, with a smile in his cunning, snake-like eyes, “we met at Augsburg—did we not?”

“Now, I had meant to be very cautious and put a bridle on my tongue, but this was more than I could stand.

“Who are you?” I said sharply, looking him straight in the face, so that he cowered before my glance. “Do you think I remember all the black-guard jail-birds I may happen to come across at an inn?” Glaring at me, the fellows remained speechless for a moment. “Yes,” I added, becoming reckless and wishing to finish the affair, “I wonder the landlord allows two such rogues as you are to come to the house.”

“The guests, thinking a quarrel would ensue, rose from their seats, and the landlord rushed between us and begged us not to fight.

“Do not trouble yourself on that score, my good man,” I said, with a sneer, for I had taken their measure by this time. “Cowards of that sort do not fight. They are more at home, I should say, at robbing the dead on a battlefield.”

“Without my having the slightest suspicion at that moment who the smaller man was, it was evident that my random shot went home. He turned as white as a sheet, and slinking away, he and his friend went on with their meal.

‘As I knew he would, on some excuse or other, while we were having our meal, Moses slipped upstairs. The miller and I sat smoking for some little time after supper, and then retired, leaving the little Jew and the red-haired man, whose name was Gluckstein, playing dominoes.

‘As I expected, I found the lock of my door had been tampered with, and the key removed to the other side. It would have been easy for me to call the landlord and draw his attention to this, but I knew I should only be putting off the evil time. So I quickly made my plans, and resolved to carry them out, come what might.

‘The door was near the window, and had it been pushed wide open would have touched my bed. With the help of the miller I moved a small chest of drawers and placed it at such an angle that, when the door was opened, a man could just squeeze through. Ketzler had a stick that was a regular bludgeon, and I meant to give my inquisitive visitor such a taste of its weight as would keep him from getting much farther.

“‘I don’t suppose I shall want your help,” I remarked to my companion; “but I may, so you must sleep in this room.”

‘There were two beds in the chamber; but, fearing he might go to sleep if he got into one, I made him settle himself down in an arm-chair, giving him plenty of counsel apropos of keeping silent, and, above all, not to go to sleep.

‘We had just finished our arrangements when I heard a slight tap at our door and a light footstep scurrying away; and, looking down, I saw that a

small piece of paper had been passed underneath it, with the single word "*Achtung*" written on it. Though, of course, this news was luckily superfluous, still I was grateful for the warning, which I knew came from the pretty chambermaid. The money I had given her had indeed not been wasted; but I resolved on the following morning, if all went well, that she should have a present that would be really worth having. A few minutes later the two scamps came upstairs.

"Well, Gluckie," said the little Jew in a purposely high tone, "I am tired. I reckon I shall sleep well to-night."

"Yes; it's hard work travelling. I shall want a good night's rest too," responded his companion; and then they commenced walking about as though they were undressing. I also did the same, and threw my boots out with a clatter.

'Soon all was silent. It was freezing outside, and the bitter cold north wind made the old sign-board outside the window creak on its hinges. The full moon—for I had drawn the curtains to see better—shone brightly, and made the room almost as light as day.

"He's asleep now," whispered Gluckstein.

"Yes; but we must wait some time yet. I can hear people about overhead. Fancy that villain remembering me after all this time. He must be the brute that shot poor Iky at Leipzig. You remember I told you all about that. You know he wounded me slightly at the same time; but I pretended to be dead, and that is how I heard about that treasure, though I could not follow exactly all they said; but when that fool blabbed at Augsburg I put the two

things together, for I remembered the young one's voice. I have not forgotten what he did that night; but I guess we shall be quits very soon."

'To pass the time, the two men, after they had had some drink, began to play cards. The red-haired one was evidently losing, and becoming excited, began to swear.

"Sh—sh—sh!" whispered Moses. "What do a few thalers matter, you fool?"

"Well, pass the *schnapps*, I say."

"No, no; you have had enough," said the other in an excited whisper.

"I tell you I will have some;" and to pacify him Moses evidently allowed him to get possession of the bottle.

'In spite of a heavy fur coat, I found it very cold waiting. Suddenly the clock struck midnight. As it did so, to my unutterable disgust the miller actually commenced to snore. And what snoring! I never in all my life heard anything like it. He began with a few deep, steady grunts, and these grunts gradually soared up till they became sharp staccato, jerky squeaks. I hardly knew whether to laugh or swear. Oh, the irony of it! There, with the moonlight shining full upon him, propped up with pillows, and with his mouth wide open, sat the cause of all the trouble, perfectly happy and unconscious of the danger before us. As I sat on the bed, it was only by biting my lips and clenching my fists that I could prevent myself from getting up and kicking him off his chair.

'It was not likely that this unearthly noise could escape the two confederates.

“Hark!” said Gluckstein; “there is no doubt about his being asleep.”

“No; but that sounds like the old one. It’s that deuced hussar we have got to settle with. I cannot understand it. They said he was in the middle room; but, anyway, take off your boots; it is time we commenced business. Now, Gluckie,” he continued in a coaxing tone, “you know what you have got to do. You simply go in as lightly as possible and search his clothes, and bring out any bag you can get. He is fast asleep; there is nothing to fear.”

‘There was not the least doubt, though the red-haired fellow had had quite enough *schnapps*, which his friend had probably allowed him to have to keep up his courage, that, now the time was coming to carry out their scheme, he did not seem quite so anxious to proceed with it.

“Gluckie! Yes, Moses, it’s always Gluckie when there’s any dirty work to be done. You go in yourself; you are smaller and lighter than I am. If that fellow wakes up there will be the Leipzig business over again.”

“No, there won’t. Here’s a knife. If you prefer it, settle him quietly as he sleeps; we shall be across the frontier long before it is found out. Now, be a good boy, and go on.”

‘You can understand my feelings as I heard this calm arrangement for my benefit. But it did not trouble me much. On the contrary, as I was in for it, I rather liked the excitement of the affair, and only feared the villains would escape.

“Just wait a moment,” said Moses; “we may as

well have the side window open. You see, we can easily slide down the stable roof."

"While he was speaking I raised myself up, hardly drawing my breath, and standing with one foot on the bed and one on the chest of drawers, I waited for the man to enter. The well-greased handle turned without a sound; the door slowly opened; but, to the surprise of the two rogues, it did not, of course, go very far back.

"Go on," whispered the Jew hurriedly as the other continued to push it; but, finding it would go no farther, he squeezed himself through into the corner by the window which I had left on purpose. Before he could realise where he was my bludgeon came down with terrific force and accuracy on his forehead, and he fell in a heap, like a bullock under the axe; but I, losing my balance, came to the ground also.

"Then what a scene followed! The miller's stentorian snores suddenly ceased. Completely losing his head with fright, he rushed to the door shouting, "Murder, murder!" as loud as ever he could. This soon brought down the landlord, his wife, and the servants.

"Yours is a respectable house indeed," I shouted angrily to the former, pointing to the prostrate form of the ruffian lying in a pool of blood with the knife still in his hand.

"Ah!" he cried, thinking the fellow was dead. "I am ruined. I am ruined. What a name my house will get!"

"Of course it was to my interest to keep the affair as quiet as possible. I did not want the police to



He fell in a heap, like a bullock under the axe.

appear on the scene, and bending down, was greatly relieved to find the man still breathing.

“He is not dead,” I said to the host.

“Say it’s a fit,” said his quick-witted wife, for, hearing the commotion, some of the people in the house were making anxious inquiries and crowding the passages in a half-dressed state.

‘Locking them out, we got the thief on to his bed and poured brandy down his throat; but for all that he remained unconscious for several hours. As for his companion, he had quickly grasped the situation and disappeared through the open window.

‘Little knowing my real motives, the landlord was deeply grateful to me for the cool and considerate way I took the whole occurrence. He would not hear of my paying the bill. I said nothing to the pretty Gretchen; but, wrapped up in the very piece of paper that I knew from her manner she had passed under the door, I gave her a souvenir that made her bright eyes sparkle.

‘With truly light hearts, very early the next morning we set off for Strasburg; and as the short day was drawing to a close we saw across the snow-clad plain the single spire of the great Minster. We were soon over the bridge at Kehl, and then we found ourselves once more in our native land, and a short drive brought us within the fortifications.

‘Never had the dear old town, with its quaint towers and gables, looked more welcome to my eyes. The great Christmas market which had been held that day was over. Farmers with wrappers up to their chins, and with carts full of presents and toys for the little ones, were hurrying off to their homes

in the mountains. Children, who had not yet got tired of the snow, were having their last throw ere their mothers called them in. From behind the cosy red curtains of the taverns came snatches of songs and laughter; for was not Christmas coming, when all the world would be gay, and even the poorest would have plenty to eat?

‘Passing up the narrow streets, we got into the Grosse Strasse, where the miller alighted to go and find his brother; while I went on to the “Roths Haus” in the Kleber Platz to order supper, which I resolved should be a good one, as Frederick Ketzler had treated me like a prince before we left for Linz.

‘Ah, what a supper was that! It makes my mouth water even now as I think of it. What trout, what a goose, and what an omelette, to say nothing of a Strasburg pie and a Bavarois! The wines, too, were of wonderful quality; though as far as I was concerned I only took a little hock, for the valuables I carried made me cautious. But my two lively companions were under no fears on that score, and as I gave them *carte blanche*, they emptied seven bottles between them of champagne and burgundy.

‘Throwing on the logs, we drew our chairs round the blazing fire and commenced to smoke. The maltster said that the house was famous for some old schiedam—no one knew the age of it—so two bottles were brought up. The brothers had both carried their wine well, but this was more than even they could manage; and I, as a slight observer of human nature, was greatly amused to see the different way this powerful spirit affected them. The miller became simply uproarious, shouting drinking-songs at

the top of his voice. To my surprise, however, it was just the reverse with the maltster. His conduct showed there was a strain of sentiment within him which I had not expected in such a shrewd, matter-of-fact man. He became perfectly maudlin, talking of the happy, innocent days of his boyhood, when he chased the butterflies among the hills, and of his never-to-be-forgotten wife who had died years ago. When he had just finished the bottle he slipped off his chair, and would have fallen against the stove had I not prevented him.

‘Carl rushed to help me, but he could not keep his balance, and fell too. However, with the help of the waiter, after I had placed Frederick on a sofa, I got him upstairs, and put him to bed with his clothes on.’

CHAPTER V.

HE next morning I was up betimes, and went and bought a number of presents for Catharine and all her family. When I got back to the hotel Ketzler was still in bed. His wild, scared look threw me into fits of laughter; but, in spite of a splitting headache that he said he had got, I made him get up and have his breakfast. Whether it was the idea of seeing his wife again, or the hopes of having another carouse, I know not, but he begged and prayed to be allowed to stay in Strasburg till I returned from Frankfort; but I would not hear of it, and at last I got him into

the carriage I had ordered. When he found inside the vehicle a beautiful English gun, several cases of schiedam which I had bought for him, to say nothing of silk dresses for his wife and Catharine, his spirits rose somewhat. His brother, who was not in the least affected by what he had taken the night before, came to see him off, and promised to come and see him when my wedding took place. The brewer asked me to supper that night, and after the meal was over I brought out the jewels. I was in hopes he might be able to give me some idea of their value; but he knew even less than I did.

“No,” he said, “these gewgaws are not in my line. I don’t know how to advise you.”

“Well,” I answered, “I know an honest Jew”——

‘A deep, sardonic laugh came from his boots.

“Yes,” I continued; “his name is Abrahams, in the Judenstrasse, Frankfort. I have done business with him before. He gave me once a thousand francs for a ring.”

“And got four thousand.”

“I don’t care what he got. It cost me nothing.”

“Well, let me tell you this,” said the brewer. “Don’t you ask a price: make him name one. Watch the fellow’s face, too, and be guided a good deal by that. Try two or three other Jews; and, above all things, do not dream of taking less than three times what they first offer. There is no doubt these stones are very valuable. But tell me,” he continued, “when you have got the money, what are you going to do with it?”

“Why, buy a beautiful little farm for Catharine up in the mountains.”

“That sounds all very well, my boy; but you have led such an active life that you would soon tire of that. You are far too clever and energetic for that sort of existence. I am getting old. Put the money into my brewery. I like Catharine; she has the sense of her mother and the good heart of Carl. You could buy her a farm, I know, outside the town, or you could live with me.”

‘I was taken by surprise at the proposal; but I certainly felt flattered by it, and promised, when I returned from Frankfort, to let the worthy man know my decision.

‘Following the brewer’s advice, when I got to Frankfort I went to see a man named Emmanuel. I did not much like the look of him; but I was glad I called. The fellow could not conceal the gleam of delight that came into his cunning, shifty eyes as I spread out the stones. He tried, as I expected, to make me name a price, which, of course, I would not do. He commenced by offering, in thalers, the equivalent of thirty-five thousand francs. This was really more than I expected, as I knew nothing about the gems. But I determined to take high ground.

“‘Thirty-five thousand francs!’” I said scornfully. “Why, that tiara alone is worth more than that.” This was a random shot on my part, but it proved a good one.

“‘But,” he answered, letting the cat out of the bag, “that stone in the centre is historical; it will have to be taken out and sent to Amsterdam to be recut. I dare not sell that as it is.”

“‘And yet you have the audacity to offer me

thirty-five thousand francs for the whole lot!" and without more ado I put the sparkling gems back into my bag, though he offered, almost with tears in his eyes, one hundred and ten thousand francs for them, and swore he would lose by it.

"Oh, that would be too dreadful," I said dryly. "I should never forgive myself if you did that;" and wishing him better luck with the next fly he got in his web, I left him cursing and swearing, to go on to my old friend.

"Ah, my friend," said Abrahams as I entered his shop, "so you have come to see me again for another little bit of business?"

"It may be a little bit of business for you," I answered; "but I have been offered over six figures for what I have brought you to-day."

"Rachel," he shouted to a very pretty granddaughter, "you come here, and we will go into the back-room."

His eyes fell at once on the centre diamond in the tiara, and they almost glittered as brightly as those of his co-religionist I had previously seen. Nor could he conceal his agitation; his fingers trembled as he handled the stones and the snuff-boxes.

"Now, my friend," he said, "you know my way of doing business. I don't know what you have been offered. If I give you more, so much the better for you; if less, try some one else."

"That is fair and above board," I replied. "What will you give?"

With pencil and paper he remained some time making calculations.

"I will give you"—and how my heart beat as he

spoke!—"I will give you, I say, one hundred and eighty-five thousand francs."

"I will take it," I said, hardly able to keep down my delight; and thereupon he gave me a draft on a banker at Strasburg that the brewer had recommended to me.

'When I got back to Strasburg and told Frederick Ketzler what had taken place he thought at first that I was joking; but when I showed him the signature of Abrahams on the draft, and it was beyond all doubt, his pleasure was almost as great as my own. I rose even higher in his esteem. I had thought about his scheme of joining him in his business, and when he pressed me again I promised to do so. The following morning I left after getting my friend to promise to come to my wedding.

"Trust me for that," he said, with a laugh. "I would do it out of gratitude for that evening at the 'Roths Haus.' We will have some more suppers of that sort when you live here, and next time, my boy, you shall not shirk the bottle."

'It was late when I got to the village; even the "Fleur-de-Lis" was closed, and I passed up the silent street without seeing a soul. The lights, however, were still shining in my brother's cottage. Apart from his smithy, Joseph had a small farm; but, having a very large family, and the two eldest being girls, it was as much as he could do to find the money to feed them. Still, he was happy and contented with his lot. I resolved that he and my nephews and nieces should be of the first to share my good fortune.

'Now, Joseph was a very austere and religious

man. I was just about to knock when I heard him, according to his custom, reading the Bible before he went to bed. Looking through the window, I saw him seated before the fire, with the youngest child on his knee and the others grouped round him. He had nearly finished the Fifth Psalm, "But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice," &c., and not till the worthy fellow had ended did I disturb him.

"What, Jacques!" he exclaimed, "back already?—Here, Mary and Ruth, get him something to eat."

"No, I cannot stay," I replied; "I am going on to the mill.—Why, Mary, *ma chérie*," I said to my eldest niece, "what's the matter with you?—Joseph, she does not look as bonny as she ought to do, considering she is engaged to be married."

"No, poor girl!" said her father. "You see, young Zebedé Schiel is a decent enough fellow, and though he says he would marry her without a *dot*, he has a wretched farm. He can't make enough to keep himself; therefore I say it is folly for her to marry him, at any rate, yet awhile. Though she frets, her own sense tells her that what I say is right. —Doesn't it, my dear?"

"Yes, father," she answered softly, with the tears standing in her eyes.

"Come here, Mary," I said, as the eyes of Ruth and the young ones opened wide.—"You tell me, my dear, when you would like to be married, and you shall have the little farm at Worstein that Catharine and I were going to have."

"Oh uncle," she said, throwing her arms round me so that her flaxen hair fell on my shoulders,

“what do you mean? Are you serious? You are always so fond of teasing me.”

“No, I am serious,” I said. “The price of that farm is four thousand francs. Here, my lass,” I continued, opening my pocket-book as I kissed her—“here are four notes each for one thousand francs, and here’s another thousand for your trousseau.—And you, Ruth,” I said, turning to her sister, “shall have the same; so if you do not get your choice of all the young fellows in these parts within a month my name is not Jacques Valbach.—Now I must be off to see Catharine.”

For a moment Mary held the precious notes in her hands, quite dazed by her good fortune, ere she kissed me again and again. Wishing them good-night, I turned off towards the mill, leaving my brother and his family on their knees, as they considered their prayers had been answered. As I approached the house Neron, the sheep-dog, commenced to bark furiously, and just as I arrived the miller opened the window, with a gun in his hand.

“What are you doing with that gun?” I shouted.

“What! is it you?” he exclaimed as I hailed him. “The cold has brought the wolves down, and I feared they were about.” In another moment the door was opened and the worthy fellow was embracing me like a long-lost son.

“What luck did you have?” he asked.

“Splendid,” I replied. “I’ll tell you about that afterwards. Where’s Catharine?” But as I spoke I heard a footstep on the stairs, and in another moment her arms were round my neck. Her feet were bare; her silky hair fell in clusters on her

shoulders; her garments had been huddled on anyhow; but she looked none the worse for all that.

‘Soon her mother and Jacob appeared, and then, when the latter had made up the fire and the miller had brought out some of the fine schiedam I had given him—he and his son were only too glad of an excuse to open another bottle—and we were all seated round the fire, I told them all I thought necessary of my journey to Frankfort.

“Well! but I want to know exactly how much you got,” said my future mother-in-law. “Five thousand francs?” she continued, evidently thinking, in her rustic ignorance, she was beyond the mark.

“More than that,” I replied.

“Ten thousand?” said the miller. The two were so intent on finding out how much I had got that they did not notice their son stealthily helping himself to schiedam from the bottle on the floor. I was in such rattling spirits and this so tickled me that I burst into fits of laughter. The miller, who imagined there was some joke going on, thought he ought to laugh too, and Catharine joined in out of pure happiness. This merriment made her mother angry.

“You have taught my husband some terrible habits,” she said. “He is not the same man since he came back.”

“I am sorry for that,” I said. “But how did you like the silk dress I sent you?”

‘This softened her a little; but she soon returned to the point again, as to how much I received for the diamonds.

“Catharine, my lass, how much do you say?”

“I don’t know, Jacques,” she answered, looking

up with a smile ; “and what’s more, I don’t care. I have got you, and that’s enough for me.”

“Well,” I said, “I have left a large sum at the bank, I have given Mary five thousand francs, and I have got thirty thousand in my pocket. I am not going to tell you how much I have got,” I continued ; “that is my affair. But, at any rate, I have got more than one hundred thousand francs altogether. See here ;” and I placed thirty thousand in notes on the table. Taking advantage of the excitement the sight of the money produced, Jacob helped himself to another glass of schiedam. But this time his mother’s eye fell upon him, and in terror he fled from the room ; and while this was taking place I took the opportunity to put a splendid gold watch and chain in Catharine’s hand.

“Oh ! this is too fine for me, Jacques,” she said.

“Yes,” said her mother ; “she will get murdered if she wears things of that sort in these parts.”

“But she won’t be in these parts.” And then I told them about the farm outside Strasburg, and how I was going to turn brewer. Catharine was delighted, and so was her father, who looked forward to coming to see us. Her mother, on the other hand, was vexed, as she wished to be near her daughter for one thing, and she had wished her brother-in-law to take her son into the business for another.

‘Catharine and I, my niece and her lover, were married at the beginning of the new year. The good old pastor married us, and never before had he received such a fee as I gave him ; and he honoured us by coming with his family to the breakfast, which took place in a large barn. Uncle Frederick came

too, and his jokes and laughter rather shocked my serious brother. It was the custom in those days, I must tell you, at country weddings, for the guests in turn, as they sat at table, to sing a song unaccompanied. This took a fairly long time, for there were a great number there. The wine went round rather fast, and some whose turn it was to sing had slipped underneath the groaning board; but they were not let off for all that. They were either pulled out or they sang where they were. Then Catharine and Mary each went round with a loving-cup, which they offered to all, who, standing, drank their health and claimed the usual kiss. When that was finished the tables were cleared, a fiddler took his place on an upturned cask, and the dancing commenced. Brother Joseph would have nothing to do with this dancing, as he thought it was wicked; but Uncle Frederick, taking my mother-in-law (who looked very grand in her new plum-coloured silk) round the waist, set the ball rolling with a vengeance, and the young people—whose sabots prevented them from putting much grace into their movements—were not slow in following their example.

‘As I had given out that Ruth was to have the same *dot* as her sister, she had three offers of marriage that very day; but her father had a voice in that matter, and it was not one of those three that she married soon after.

‘The following morning, according to the custom of our district, all the neighbours came to pay their respects to the brides. More came to see Catharine than Mary, for somehow or other it had got about that the miller had opened a fresh case of schiedam.

Then we all started for a wolf-hunt. Unfortunately (perhaps the schiedam had something to do with it) two neighbours were hit at the very commencement of the chase, which was more than I can say of any wolf, and this rather spoilt the proceedings. On the third and last day of the festivities the brides went round the village to receive the congratulations of our neighbours, and then it was that they received their various presents, while the bells of the little church clanged out merrily and the men fired off guns.

‘Never before, and never since, has there been such a wedding. It became a landmark in the history of the village. Men said, “I sold my farm two years after Jacques Valbach was married,” and they reckoned their good or bad vintages and harvests from that date; and well they might, for apart from the members of the old pastor’s and my brother’s family, I don’t think for the three days there was a sober man in the whole country-side. Yet I do not wish you to think for one moment that the worthy peasants of our district are more given to drinking than those of other parts. On the contrary, it is only by way of a treat, on high days and holidays, that they ever give way to intoxication; and even then not to any extent, except it is at the expense of some one else, for the Alsatians are naturally a frugal folk.

‘After we were married and comfortably settled down just outside Strasburg, my worthy father-in-law found out that business brought him very often into town. We were always glad to see his bright, jovial face; but I sometimes used to wonder how he got home. Catharine had a large family; and when-

ever "the stork * paid us a visit," as we say in Strasburg, her mother came down and fussed about for a time ; otherwise we saw little of her. Dear old Uncle Frederick has long since been gathered to his fathers. Even in his time I had increased the business of the brewery ; but if he could only see it now, with its large warehouses and tall chimneys, I think it would indeed make him rub his eyes.

'It gives me pleasure to contemplate all this : but I derive far more from beholding my beloved Catharine and my children around me.'

* The *cigogne*, which builds its nest on the chimneys at Strasburg in the spring, is supposed to bring good luck.

A VAAL RIVER ADVENTURE.

BY A PIONEER.

N the early eighties I found myself in Kimberley, having left England the previous year for South Africa with the laudable ambition of making my fortune in ten years, and then returning home. So far I had not made any apparent advance on the road to wealth; for, after a twelvemonth's residence in various parts of the colony, I could only boast of the possession of a varied stock of experience, the clothes on my back, and about thirty pounds in cash—a sum considerably less than that at my disposal when I first landed in the country.

In justice to myself I must say that my want of success was attributable not to any want of energy on my part, but principally to a lack of experience of the colony and its ways, and probably also to a limited acquaintance with human nature, for which my comparative youth—I was only twenty-four—was responsible.

I stayed at Mrs Costelloe's well-known boarding-house, where about twenty-five sat down to table every day. Almost all of these had billets of some sort in the Civil Service, banks, or stores; but there was one man amongst them who, like myself, seemed to have nothing particular to do. Being the only idlers in the place, we met frequently, and became

fairly well acquainted. He looked a respectable, elderly man, of medium height and build, apparently about fifty years of age, with fishy-looking eyes of pale blue, and was clean-shaven except as to the chin, on which grew a short, sandy beard of goatee pattern.

In one of our conversations he informed me that his name was Johnstone, that he had originally been a sailor (second-mate on a tea-clipper), had been for many years past gold-digging in Australia, and had left that country with two chums to try his luck at the newly discovered goldfields at De Kaap, in the Transvaal. On the road up his two mates caught the fever and died; then, losing heart, he had given up the idea of continuing the journey, and had returned to the diamond-fields.

One evening after dinner Johnstone came to my room, where he found me sitting on the bed indulging in an after-dinner pipe.

‘Well, Johnstone,’ I said, ‘what’s the news?’

‘Just this, Mr Hall, that I start for the river diggings to-morrow, and you might do worse than join me. I shall go in any case; but, of course, I should prefer having a partner that I could get along with.’

At first I pooh-poohed the idea, having heard from several people that, whatever they may have been in the past, the river diggings then did not pay.

In reply, Johnstone assured me that such was not the case; that he had gone down to Barkly to satisfy himself by making inquiries on the spot, and found that the poor reputation of the river diggings was mainly owing to the fact that most of the fellows

who tried their luck at it were loafers from the town, who were incapable of doing an honest day's work with pick and shovel, much less of continuing at it for months; but that a steady, hard-working digger could always pay his expenses and put by something as well. He also pointed out that every week I spent in Kimberley cost me three pounds for board and lodging alone, whereas at the river the cost of living would be next to nothing, as the staple of our food would be meal, and there were plenty of good fish to be had for the catching.

I further learned that the initial outlay would only be three or four pounds each. While making inquiries at Barkly, Johnstone said he came across two young fellows who had been digging for a few months, but had got tired of the solitary life; and as they wished to return to the delights of town, they offered him their whole rig-out, including tent, cooking utensils, and mining plant, for six pounds. Johnstone jumped at the chance, and had arranged to be down on the Saturday morning—this was Thursday evening—to take possession of the property.

Before Johnstone had finished I made up my mind to join him, as I had mentally contrasted the heat and dust at Kimberley during the coming hot months with the coolness and leafy shade to be had on the banks of the Vaal.

I told Johnstone my decision; but at the same time I thought it only right to mention to him that I had not been accustomed to manual labour, and that consequently I feared I would not be of much use at first.

It appeared, however, that Johnstone had decided

to commence by washing the old *débris*-heaps along the river, leaving the hard work of digging out the alluvium as a last resort. For the information of the uninitiated, I may mention that the alluvial diggings on the Vaal are situated on the kopjes or small hills running parallel to the course of the river, but about a mile or so distant from it. The gravel was dug out of these kopjes and carted down to the river to be washed; but as in the early days the methods of washing and sorting were primitive in the extreme, these old *débris*-heaps well repaid the trouble of rewashing and sorting, the finds, although generally small in size, being more certain than in the case of the alluvial diggings. In addition, of course, the digger was saved the labour and expense of digging and carting the alluvium to the river.

The following afternoon, by giving the Kaffir owner a trifle, we got a lift on an empty wood-wagon, which left us a little beyond Barkly, close to the river and the site of our future camp, where, on arriving on the Saturday morning, we found our predecessors anxiously waiting for us to come and take possession.

We started work on Monday morning, and the week's washing showed a result of about three carats of diamonds. Sometimes, but not often, we did better, and sometimes worse; but it was seldom indeed that we had not something for the diamond-buyer on his weekly visit.

After about three months of steady work it was apparent that Johnstone's prediction was about to be fulfilled: that we should pay expenses and be able to put a little by; but I saw plainly that there was no

prospect of making even a small fortune at the work. Although I liked the life so far, I was beginning to feel that one could have too much of it.

Our modest supplies of groceries, &c., we got from Barkly, which was about a couple of miles lower down the river; and by Johnstone's desire, whenever a visit to the village became necessary, I always went, as my chum, like the majority of diggers, was apt to go on a drunken spree when he found himself in town after a spell of camp-life. I generally borrowed a boat belonging to a family named Murray, who lived close to the river, but a little nearer to Barkly than our camp was.

After we had been about three months at work, I started off one Saturday evening for Barkly, as our supplies were getting low, and while paddling down the river had made up my mind to speak to Johnstone on my return about dissolving partnership. When I mentioned casually to Fred Thompson, the store-keeper, that I intended to give up digging and return to Kimberley, he said he was not surprised at my getting tired of the work, as it was too monotonous.

'You want variety, my boy,' he observed, 'and you don't get any in débris-washing. By hard work you get a fairly regular supply of small diamonds, but never a chance of a big one. Now, in working the alluvium, the value of your finds in the year would not probably be as much; but a man has always the chance, although it may be a poor one, of turning up a big stone; and it's in human nature to like a bit of a gamble. And yet,' he added in a musing tone, 'it seems strange too, when you come to think of it,

that you should have to chuck the job and thousands of diamonds probably lying at your very feet !'

'What do you mean?' I exclaimed.

'Simply that the river-bed is full of good stones if you could only get at it. Why, last year, the boys at Niekirk's Rush managed to divert a narrow arm of the river, and took out over thirty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds in a few weeks. Mind you, the season was a very dry one, and the river consequently lower than it had been for years, otherwise they couldn't have done it; but it just shows that the stones are there right enough.'

All the way back to camp my mind kept running on what Thompson had told me, and my first idea was to tell Johnstone what I had heard, and induce him to join me in hiring a boat and trying the river from Hebron down for a likely spot; but fortunately second thoughts prevailed, and I decided instead to take a holiday on the Monday, and, borrowing Murray's boat, to row down a few miles of the river on a little exploring expedition of my own.

On my way back I called in at Murray's, and made it all right about the boat for Monday.

I said nothing to Johnstone that night, but on the Monday morning told him I was going to take an 'off-day,' as I had a lazy fit on, and thought I should like to see how the river looked lower down.

I started early, paddling slowly down the river, and examining carefully every likely spot for a trace of an old channel, but without success.

About midday I calculated I was over eleven miles below our camp; and, as I would have the current against me going back, I thought it best to return.

On my way back I came to a sharp bend in the river, which I recognised as a place I had passed a few hours previously. The river at this particular spot was much wider, or rather the high banks which bounded it on both sides were much farther apart, the channel in which the water ran being rather narrower here than elsewhere. The terrific floods coming down the river in the rainy season, sweeping with great force round the turn, had gradually washed away a portion of the bank and deepened the channel next it at this point, thus leaving a considerable stretch of dry ground between the opposite bank and the stream. On considering the matter, it struck me that part of this space next the water must originally have been the bed of the river, although now fully four feet above the level of the water, and covered with grass. I had brought a shovel with me in the boat, and no sooner had I come to this conclusion than I proceeded to verify its correctness by digging in the low bank about three feet from the edge. I tried three different places, to the depth of about three feet or so, but could get no gravel; the whole bank all along appeared to be composed of nothing but fine sand.

I must confess I was considerably disappointed at the result of my operations, as I had reasoned out the matter so clearly. The bed of the river, shelving down into the deep hole on the one side, had seemed to point so conclusively to the fact that the river had receded from its boundary on the other side, and that consequently at some time in the past—and that not so very long ago, even with the river at its normal level—water must have been flowing over much of what was now dry land on the shallow side of the

river. However, nothing more was to be done ; so, throwing the shovel into the boat, I pushed off.

Half-way home I suddenly paused in my rowing as the true explanation of my failure flashed across me. I had not dug deep enough ! The action of the current against the curve of the bank created a back-water, which in a flood would deposit on the level shore at the shallow side the sand and stuff eaten away by the water out of the opposite bank ; so that I had been digging into the accumulation of sand silted up by this backwash, and consequently the old bed of the river must lie under this, if my hypothesis were correct.

It was too late now to think of returning ; but I determined to start in the morning at daybreak, and settle the question finally.

When I got to our camp I was relieved to find Johnstone had already turned in, as I felt tired and hungry, and not at all in the humour to reply to all the questions he would have been sure to put.

I was up the next morning while it was scarcely yet light, feeling rather stiff after the unwonted exercise of yesterday ; but a plunge in the river freshened me up completely. On my way back to the tent I looked at our night-line, which Johnstone had set over-night, and on hauling it in got two fine barbel. One of these I left for my partner ; the other I cooked and partly ate for breakfast, putting the remainder into the boat for future use.

Before leaving I scribbled a few lines to Johnstone, telling him I had gone down the river to prospect for a better site for our camp, and hoped to be back in a few hours with some good news for him. I fastened

this to the handle of the kettle as the surest place for him to find it; and throwing into the boat a sieve and a shovel, as well as the lid of an old packing-case to serve as a sorting-table, I dropped down the river.

As I left, the sun was just glinting on the tops of the trees which thickly clothe the steep banks of the Vaal along its course, and the only sound which broke the stillness of the summer morning was the continuous calling of the wood-pigeons in the trees. Here below on the water everything seemed deliciously cool and fresh. My hopes were high as to the success of my little prospecting expedition, and as I paddled slowly down-stream I felt to the full that enjoyment of mere existence so seldom experienced after youth has passed.

In a little under three hours I was at the scene of the previous day's operations, which, I calculated, lay about seven miles below Barkly by river. I was soon engaged deepening one of the holes I had made there, and had scarcely dug a foot deeper when, to my delight, I felt the shovel grate as it touched gravel underneath. I lost no time in getting a shovelful of this stuff into the sieve, and in washing and turning it out on my sorting-table. If I had had any expectation—as I am half-afraid was the case—of seeing the surface of the wet gravel studded over with diamonds like raisins in a plum-pudding, I was doomed to be disappointed, as not a single diamond met my eager gaze; but I did see a very beautiful and rich deposit of diamond-bearing gravel. However, I knew enough about river-digging by this time to be aware that such a rich deposit of these pebbles must mean good finds of the more valuable

stones. After all, I could scarcely expect to be in luck at the very first start off. I soon had another sieveful washed and on the board, and I had scarcely turned back the sieve before I saw that this time, at all events, I was not going to draw a blank, for there staring me in the face was a diamond as large as a pigeon's egg. Half-expecting it to turn out a lump of crystal, I took it up, and saw at once that it was not only a genuine diamond, but one of beautiful shape and colour.

The find was good enough for me. I hastily filled in the holes, and, although it was then early in the forenoon, merely broke my fast with a biscuit before starting back again, postponing a more substantial meal until I reached camp, which I was anxious to do as soon as possible.

My reasons for hurrying back were twofold. First of all, I was anxious to get our camp shifted to the new ground without delay, as, after the long spell of dry weather, heavy rains might commence any day, and a flood would put an end to operations for the rest of the season. Besides this, I was getting uneasy about Johnstone, and half-regretted the wording of my note. Knowing the old fellow to be of an excitable temperament, I feared that my mention of 'good news' might have unsettled him: then he might leave off work, and having no one to talk to, might go down to the village, which—from what he had told me about himself—would mean a week's 'drunk' at the least. However, as I turned a bend of the river and came in sight of our tent, my mind was relieved on seeing Johnstone pacing up and down the bank. I had expected a jawing; but as soon as my

mate perceived me he went into the tent and remained there. Seeing he was in the sulks, I determined to let him remain so until after I had had my dinner, as I had something to show which would soon cause him to alter his tune.

When I entered the tent after a while, I found Johnstone sitting on a box smoking, and in anything but a good temper. He complained that I had deserted him, as he called it, and made altogether too much of the matter. I tried to calm him down by explaining that I had been away prospecting in our joint interests.

‘And what did you get for your pains?’ he asked, with a sneer. ‘Nothing much, I’ll bet, by your being back so mighty early.’

Assuming a careless tone, I said, ‘Well, I have nothing but this to show,’ at the same time pulling the diamond out of my pocket and exhibiting it on my open hand.

I never saw any face change its expression so suddenly as my mate’s when he saw the big stone; the ill-tempered look disappeared as if by magic, and he literally gazed open-mouthed at my find. Suddenly he startled me by snatching at the stone and making off with it to the entrance of the tent. I had half-risen from my seat to follow him, when I saw that he had merely taken it to the light to examine it more closely. After a few seconds he handed it back, exclaiming, ‘It’s a diamond right enough, and a whopper! Why, hang me! it ought to fetch close on a thousand pounds. You’re a lucky fellow, Hall, that’s all I can say, for I suppose I can’t expect a look in.’

Now, considering the circumstances under which the stone was found, I doubted whether Johnstone had any right to claim a half-share in it. Still, as there was a doubt, I thought he should get the benefit of it; and, moreover, I considered it would be impolitic on my part to create in his mind anything of the nature of a grievance, considering how implicitly I should have to trust him in the matter of future finds. I therefore delighted the old fellow by telling him that we would share alike in this as in our other finds.

‘Shake hands, mate,’ he cried; ‘you mustn’t mind my little bit of temper, for, after all, I’m only a rough old digger, and I fairly got the hump this morning when I turned out and found you were off again. And now, sonny, spin us the yarn as soon as you like.’

When he had heard my story Johnstone was as anxious to start for the new El Dorado as I was. The boat, of course, would have been the easiest and quickest method of transport; but our taking it would have meant acquainting the owner with the whereabouts of our new camp, which we wished to conceal for a week or so, by which time we hoped to have finished our operations there. We accordingly decided to get a lift on an ox-wagon, and get off when about opposite our destination, as the road to Kimberley approached the river at that point.

It was late in the evening by the time we had struck camp and carried our tent and stores, &c., up to the edge of the main road. We had not long to wait before a wood-wagon came lumbering along,

bound for the Kimberley morning market, and mid-night saw us fairly *en route*.

The river after leaving Barkly curves away from the road somewhat in the form of an arc, of which the road forms the chord. I had guessed the place we were making for to be about seven miles below the village by river; and two hours after leaving Barkly we should, at the rate we were travelling, be about five miles distant from that place by the road. When we judged the wagon was this distance from the town we got off, as by doing so then I fancied we ought to strike the river somewhere about the point desired.

Day was just breaking; and, leaving Johnstone in charge of our belongings, I made my way through the mimosa-bushes to the Vaal, which must have been nearly a mile distant from the road. From the high ground above the river I could, in the rapidly growing light, trace its course through the surrounding flat country for a considerable distance, and had no difficulty in locating the spot for which I was looking, which, however, was much farther off than I had anticipated. The miscalculation as to distance delayed us somewhat, and entailed some additional labour in carrying our belongings down to our future camping-ground; but everything comes to an end at last, and in a couple of hours or so the tent was up and breakfast ready.

We were too anxious to see what luck had in store for us to waste much time over this meal, and were shortly hard at work with the shovel. We soon found that the gravel was going to turn out as rich in diamonds as, from its appearance, I had anticipated.

We came across no very large ones; but when we knocked off work for the day we were well satisfied with the result of our labour.

At the end of a week we had worked through the limited reach of gravel at our disposal, being greatly hampered in our operations by the water, which came draining in as fast as we took out the gravel; in fact, for the last couple of days we were working up to our knees in water the greater part of the time. No doubt if we had been able to fix up an arrangement for pumping out the water we could have done even better than we did, as we had to leave a lot of gravel unwashed; but, as it was, we considered we had made a fine haul. Strange to say, we never came across a stone in size anything like my first find; but we found several stones of good colour and shape and much above the average in size, and also a great number of smaller ones similar to the usual run of river stones. Our total finds filled a medium-sized tin pannikin holding, I should say, over half-a-pint; and, including the big one, we valued the lot roughly at somewhere about six thousand pounds.

We kept the stones in a small canvas bag, which we placed out of the reach of prying eyes in a corner of the box holding our small store of meal, coffee, &c. As a matter of fact, however, we might safely have left the bag lying about anywhere, as the only stranger who broke in upon our solitude was the Kaffir *umfan* who brought us a bottle of goat's milk every morning.

There was nothing now to keep us from proceeding to Kimberley and disposing of our precious hoard. We accordingly decided to go next day by the post-

cart, which left Barkly daily at noon. The cart passed within a mile of us, but was more than likely to be full by that time. Besides, we wished to settle something about our impedimenta, especially the tent, which was of fair size and nearly new. It was advisable, therefore, that one of us should go into Barkly the next morning after breakfast and engage our seats, as well as arrange with Fred Thompson to send for our things and take charge of them until he heard from us. Johnstone volunteered for the job, saying he had one or two little purchases to make. I tried to dissuade him; but he seemed determined on going, saying, 'You needn't be uneasy about me, partner. I'm not going on the burst till we get to Kimberley; and in any case you'll have charge of the bag of beauties.'

'Very well,' I said; 'but mind, whether you're on the cart or not, I go straight into Kimberley and deposit the bag in the bank the first thing, as I don't want to carry six thousand pounds' worth of diamonds about with me a minute longer than I can help.'

'That's all right, mate,' he replied. 'I'll turn up in the cart right enough, you bet.'

I had my doubts about this, but I could not very well say more.

We had breakfast about eight o'clock the next morning, and Johnstone started immediately afterwards. This left him ample time to walk the six miles into Barkly, and a margin of over an hour and a half after he got there in which to transact his business. As he was mounting the bank I shouted to him that, in case we missed one another, I should put up at the old shop—Costelloe's. He turned,

giving a sailor's flourish of the arm to show he understood, and a few seconds after had gained the top and disappeared.

There was now an interval of some three hours before me, and as there was absolutely nothing to be done, I lit my pipe and made myself comfortable on the grass. I had been so hard-worked of late that I really enjoyed my little spell of idleness, and the time passed so quickly that I was surprised, on looking at my watch, to find it was nearly twelve o'clock.

As it was now time to be on the move to meet the post-cart, I went into the tent, raised up the lid of the store-box, and was putting down my hand mechanically to lift out the bag of diamonds, when I stopped short on discovering, to my amazement, that the bag had disappeared. It had certainly been there the preceding night, for, after adding the day's finds, I had tied it up and put it in the usual corner; but whether it had been there in the morning I was unable to tell, as my partner had done the cooking, and taken from the box what was needed for our meal. A careful search all about the tent produced no result; the diamonds were gone, and there seemed no room to doubt that Johnstone was the thief.

When I thought of the scurvy trick my mate had played me after the decent way in which I had treated him, I was seized with a sudden rage; and I verily believe that if I could have laid hands on the old fellow at that moment I would have throttled him. I was too dazed at the sudden discovery of my loss to be able, at the moment, to form any definite plan of action; but, as there was still time to catch the post-cart, I hurried towards the road, partly running,

partly walking, urged on by a faint hope that Johnstone might turn up after all.

On the way I met Piet, the Kaffir boy who brought us the morning's milk; and, not knowing when I might return, I arranged with him to look after the tent and things for a few days, giving him half-a-crown, and promising five shillings more if everything was all right when I came back.

I had got over the ground so quickly that when I reached the road there was still ten minutes to spare before the post-cart was due. I found that the exercise had been of service to me, and that I could now think out the situation clearly and decide upon what was best to be done.

I felt I might dismiss from my mind at once, as not worth consideration, for several reasons, the probability of any one having entered the tent at night and abstracted the diamonds. Undoubtedly the first thing to be done was to get on my partner's track as soon as possible. Now, two miles farther on, in the direction of Kimberley, there was situated at a bend of the river a hotel much frequented as a health resort by visitors from that town; and it occurred to me that by hiring a horse from there I should save a lot of time. I could then ride into Barkly, and if unsuccessful in finding any trace of Johnstone having been there that morning, I would return along the Kimberley road and see if I might be able to get on his track in that direction.

A cloud of dust in the distance now heralded the approach of the post-cart, and as soon as it was near enough to enable me to distinguish the passengers I eagerly looked to see if I could recognise the form

of Johnstone amongst them, but could discern no one at all resembling him. I was glad to notice, however, that there was one vacant seat; and on my giving the driver a sign he pulled up. Swinging myself up into the spare seat, we were bowling along in a few seconds at the rate of eight miles an hour, and I had the satisfaction of feeling that I was now fairly on the search for the missing treasure.

Fifteen minutes brought us to the hotel: and, after tipping the driver for the lift, I got down and proceeded to look for the landlord. As I passed the bar on my way, it struck me that if friend Johnstone had taken the road to Kimberley he would hardly have missed this chance of a drink, especially as the next canteen was seven miles distant. Inquiries put to the barman elicited the fact that a man answering Johnstone's description had been there that morning, had had several drinks, and had left about an hour before, after asking the distance to Kimberley.

This was good news indeed, if the man were really Johnstone. Hurrying out, I settled with the landlord for the hire of a Cape-cart and driver, explaining to him the object for which I wanted it. I elected to drive instead of riding, as by doing so I could at any time send back the cart in charge of the driver, and thus leave my own movements unfettered.

Too impatient to wait for the cart to come to the door of the hotel, I went round to the stables, where the judicious application of a little palm-oil hastened matters wonderfully, and I was shortly again on the track of my absconding partner. Nothing appeared in sight until we had gone a couple of miles, when I observed a wagon some distance ahead, drawn up to

one side of the road. As we came nearer I saw the body of a man stretched on the ground, face upwards, and a Kaffir leaning over him. Driving over to the spot, I recognised the body to be that of my partner, although the features were fearfully contorted.

A short examination showed me that he was quite dead, the chest being completely crushed in. Although Johnstone had treated me badly, I could not help feeling sorry for the fate which had befallen him. According to the Kaffir's story, as translated to me by my driver, it appeared that Johnstone had got a lift on this wagon, and that, shortly after getting up, his hat had blown off, and in jumping down to recover it while the wagon was still in motion, his foot slipped and he fell underneath the front-wheel, both wheels thus passing over his body.

My first idea was to carry the body in the cart to Kimberley, and I stooped down to take from the pockets any money or valuables there might be, as well as the parcel of diamonds which I felt sure Johnstone must have had about him. I found in his breast-pocket a pocket-book containing notes, and in his trousers-pocket some loose money; but the diamonds were not on the body.

This was a new complication, appearing just as I thought my troubles were over. It then occurred to me that perhaps the bag of diamonds had dropped out of Johnstone's pocket when he fell off the wagon. I immediately looked on the ground all about the scene of the accident, but to no purpose. It was evident that either my partner had buried the diamonds—in which case I might give up all hope of ever getting them—or that the Kaffir had them in his possession;

therefore I then and there decided not to let that individual out of my sight for a moment until I had satisfied myself fully on this point.

After considering a moment or two, I concluded the simplest plan would be to treat the Kaffir to some drink, and then thoroughly search both him and his wagon. I got my driver to explain to him that, as his wagon had been the cause of the white man's death, he must take the corpse to the police-station at Kimberley, and that I would go along with him. We then lifted the body between us on to the wagon.

On arriving at the outspanning-place I gave some money to my driver and sent him over to the canteen for two bottles of 'Cape smoke.' I also told him to bring me a cotton blanket from the store to throw over the corpse.

When the driver returned with the things I sent him back with the cart and horses to the hotel, as I had no further need for them. On my showing a bottle of the brandy to the Kaffir, and telling him, 'You plenty drunk to-night,' an unholy grin overspread his little, wizened face, and he wanted to commence at once; but this I would not have, not wishing him to begin drinking too early in the day, as the time I wanted him in a stupefied condition was late in the evening, when all the other wagons had trekked and I had the place to myself.

By eight o'clock that night the other wagons had all gone, and the Koranna was sleeping off the effects of the drink. I could now leave him with safety; and I must say I was not sorry, as I had not broken my fast since breakfast, and was literally starving,

not having thought of bringing food with me in the cart. Going over to the canteen, I satisfied my hunger with some biscuits and cheese, and borrowing a lantern from the proprietor, at once commenced operations. First of all I thoroughly searched the corpse, which was, of course, by this time quite stiff. This was a gruesome task ; but I went through with it, and satisfied myself that there were no diamonds concealed about the body or clothes. I next turned my attention to the Koranna ; but a careful search failed to discover any on him either. Finally, I thoroughly overhauled the front-box, the two side-boxes, and the body of the wagon, but without success. It was clear that my partner must have buried the diamonds, and I might whistle for any chance I had of ever recovering them.

When I fully realised that my little fortune was gone I quite lost my temper. A period of depression succeeded, my spirit being crushed for the time by the suddenness of the blow which had fallen on me. The rest of the night I could only recall for a long time as a horrible nightmare, in which I saw again the grinning corpse on the wagon, and myself rousing with difficulty the Koranna from his drunken sleep, and getting him to inspan the oxen to toil again along the road on that dreary night-trek.

We reached Kimberley in the small hours of the morning, and during the course of the day I complied with the formalities and had Johnstone's remains interred in the local cemetery. When everything was finished I went to a hotel, ordered a room, and got into bed, completely worn out with fatigue and disappointment.

I awoke the next morning much refreshed after my long sleep. On going out I found it a typical South African morning: everything was bathed in sunshine, the clear air giving you the sense of buoyancy and exhilaration always experienced on the tablelands of the Cape during the winter months.

After a good breakfast I began to feel more reconciled to the situation, and thought I would like first of all to see how I stood financially after my three months at the river diggings; so, going into the smoking-room, I counted the money in my purse, which would practically represent my net receipts for this period, as I had only taken down with me a couple of pounds. I found I had twenty-six pounds odd of my own. I then took out Johnstone's pocket-book, which contained twenty-two pounds in notes and gold, after the expenses of the interment had been paid out of it. I had not the slightest hesitation in appropriating this money, as a slight set-off to the diamonds of which my worthy partner had robbed me. I doubted, indeed, if he had any relatives living to claim the money, as he had told me he had never married, and had always led a 'lone Jack' sort of existence.

I had thus made forty-six pounds by my three months' absence at the river. 'It might well have been worse,' I said to myself.

Now that the pocket-book was empty I noticed something hard and flat in a side-compartment. This proved to be a thin, flat stone about the size of a five-shilling piece, but of an oval form, and having on one side some characters traced with the point of a penknife or some pointed instrument. The scratches

still showed white, proving they had only been recently made; and, looking at the stone, I wondered to myself if in these marks lay the key to the position of the hidden diamonds. Strange to say, it had never occurred to me until that moment that Johnstone, if he had buried the diamonds, might have made a memorandum showing the bearings of the spot; but now, on considering the matter, I saw that if that spot were on the open veldt he could not have found it again unless he had done so. The veldt all about the neighbourhood of our camp was one monotonous expanse of level ground, dotted over with mimosa-bushes and ant-heaps, each as like the other as two peas. If, after parting from me ostensibly to go to Barkly, he had doubled back to the river, he might, of course, have selected a place at the foot of some tree of peculiar appearance; but even then he would probably have taken a note of the bearings of the spot, in the fear that, after the spree which he probably promised himself, his recollection of the matter might not be too clear.

The marks on the stone, though it is somewhat difficult to describe them, were simple enough in appearance. They consisted of two parallel lines about a quarter of an inch apart and running across the middle of the stone in the direction of its length; nearly equidistant from both ends of the stone and between the parallel lines a small dot was scratched; and from this stretched a row of three dots in a line with each other and nearly at right angles to the double line. At the extreme end of the row of dots was a small x, and nearly opposite, but on the other side of the parallel lines, was a larger X.

I had been disappointed too often to be very sanguine about this being the key to the position of the buried diamonds, or of my being able to solve the puzzle even if it were; but, considering the amount at stake, I thought the chance worth trying. Replacing the stone in the pocket-book, I resolved to dismiss the matter from my mind for the present, but to start that day for the camping-place at the river, and there, on the spot, and free from interruption, spend a few days in trying to work out a solution to the riddle.

The Barkly post-cart, I knew, started early in the afternoon; and, thinking it best to make sure of a seat, I directed my steps towards the booking-office. On my way I called in at the butcher's and baker's, and laid in a small supply of fresh meat and bread. In addition, I bought a few odds and ends at a neighbouring store, including a garden-scoop, which I thought would be handier than a spade, and just as efficient for my purpose, as the parcel of diamonds, if buried at all, should be close to the surface of the ground, Johnstone having taken with him no implement whatever.

For convenience of carriage, I had the various articles tied up in an empty coffee-bag, and saw that a boy was sent off at once with them to the coach-office.

After booking my seat I paid a visit to the bank and increased the small balance to my credit by the addition of the money I had brought up with me from the river, less a couple of pounds, which I retained for contingencies.

The post-cart started at 2 P.M., and about two and

a half hours afterwards it dropped me at the point nearest the camp. Shouldering the bag, I tramped across the intervening space to the river, wondering if I should still see the tent up, and if Piet had continued at his post during my absence. However, when I got to the edge of the bank and looked across, I saw Piet and other two Kaffirs squatting round a fire, and the tent standing in its old place. On entering the tent I was somewhat surprised to find that everything was apparently untouched; even my old working clothes, that I had taken off before leaving, were still lying where I had thrown them. Very much pleased, I called over Piet and gave him a shilling more than I had promised, telling him that I had come back to stop for a few days, and that if he liked to remain to do the cooking and look after the camp I would give him a half-sovereign. This he at once agreed to, much to my satisfaction, as the arrangement left me free to devote all my time to the work in hand.

I broiled a piece of the meat for dinner, and when I had finished, made Piet happy by giving him a piece to cook for himself. Going into the tent, I sat down, lit my pipe, and, with a small pannikin of grog at my elbow, prepared to make an attempt at deciphering Johnstone's hieroglyphics.

I soon saw that my only chance of success was to bring method to bear on the investigation of the marks. First, then, I asked myself, what were the parallel lines intended to represent? The crosses and dots might have more than one meaning; but the lines, I thought, were meant to give a representation of a particular object. If I could but guess this

correctly it would put me far on the way to solving the rest of the puzzle.

After considering for some time, I could only think of two objects to which the lines bore any possible resemblance: a river and a road. Dealing with the theory of the river first, I thought the small dot between the lines might mean an island, the large X on one side of the river a landmark of some sort, and the small x on the other side might indicate the actual hiding-place. I knew, from having rowed the distance, that there was no island between the site of our old camp and that of our present one, and Piet had told me that there was no island below us. About half a mile lower down there was a small sandbank in the river, which might well be what Johnstone had intended the dot to stand for, and I proposed to pay a visit next day to this spot and spend the time in thoroughly examining the surroundings.

The next morning after breakfast I told Piet not to expect me back until the evening: and, putting a few biscuits in my pocket, I started off to ascertain the correctness or otherwise of the theories I had formed. When I got opposite the sandbank I carefully scrutinised the opposite side of the river, but could see only the usual fringe of weeping-willows and cotton-plants along the edge of the water. There was nothing particular to catch the eye in any of the trees or on the face of the bank—nothing that showed up at all as a landmark. I then spent several hours in carefully examining the ground in the neighbourhood for any sign of the surface having been lately disturbed, but without success. I could

not discover even the trace of any person having descended the bank to the river within a mile or so of the spot on either side ; and as the soil was light and friable, any such traces would have been at once apparent.

Assuming that I had been altogether out in my theory of the preceding evening, I returned to the tent somewhat disheartened. There now remained to be tested the theory that the parallel lines represented a road. If a road, it must be the main road to Kimberley, as there was no other anywhere near. In this case the large X would probably represent our camp, and the small x on the other side of the road the spot where the diamonds were buried ; but, try as I might, I could not explain to myself the meaning of the dot between the parallel lines, if the latter were meant to represent a road. I left over the examination of the road until the next morning, but determined to be up at daybreak and try to have the search over in the forenoon, so as to enable me to return to Kimberley by the post-cart. For, to tell the truth, I had not much faith in the road theory, and was beginning to tire of this will-o'-the-wisp chase.

On the supposition that the large X represented the camp, if I stood with my back to the latter and facing the road, the dot between the parallel lines lay a little to the right of the camp. I therefore directed my course the next morning to a point on the road exactly opposite the tent, and when I reached it, turned to the right, in the direction of Barkly. I had walked along in the red sand of the road for about a mile, when I saw something ahead which quickened my pulse and gave me a hope that at last

I was on the right track. This was a large boulder of ironstone cropping up in the middle of the road, its top burned a shiny pitch-black by the action of the sun and weather. One often meets with these boulders on up-country roads in South Africa, and I wondered now that I had not thought of it as a natural explanation of the dot between the lines.

I had still the puzzle of the three dots to work out. My first idea had been that they represented measurements of some sort; but on looking at the stone I saw that the dots were placed about a quarter of an inch to the right of the dot between the parallel lines. As the sketch was not drawn to scale, this distance might mean anything from a yard to a mile; but it was evident the dots could not mean measurements of any sort, as there was no point marked on the stone from which to commence the count. I thought, therefore, that these marks must stand for three objects to be seen on the veldt, either fixed or placed there by Johnstone. Of fixed objects there were only two to be seen: mimosa-bushes and ant-heaps. The latter in this part of the country reach a height of from two and a half to three feet, but farther north are to be found of much greater height. I considered it more likely that Johnstone had chosen fixed objects as indicators, and I elected to commence with the ant-heaps as being more in accordance with the character of the marks. If I could find within half a mile or so to the right of the boulder three ant-heaps in a line with each other, and nearly at right angles to the road, I might reasonably conclude that I should find the diamonds buried close to the farthest of the three.

Commencing at the boulder, I walked along the road towards Barkly; but although the veldt was dotted over with ant-heaps and I passed several close to the road, I could see none in the required position. I had covered more than a quarter of a mile, and was beginning to feel a little anxious, when I came opposite an ant-heap about ten yards from the road, having two others behind it, almost in a line. I now began to breathe again; and going over to the far side of the third heap, I commenced to scoop away the sand to the depth of five or six inches. In a few seconds the point of the scoop struck something soft, which proved to be the neck of the canvas bag. On opening it I found the diamonds apparently untouched, the large one on the top and the others beneath, just as when I had put them away on the last evening we had spent in camp. Fastening up the bag, I slipped it into my pocket and made for camp again, highly delighted at my success.

In burying the diamonds Johnstone no doubt followed the wisest course, as it was scarcely possible he could have got clear away with the stones. To attempt to sell such a fine parcel of river-stones at Kimberley would have been to invite public attention to himself, and it would have been difficult to leave that town for the coast without being observed, as at that time the railway had only reached Beaufort West, four hundred miles distant from the diamond-fields. This necessitated a tedious journey by coach or the still slower mule-wagon; and these conveyances having stated times of departure and travelling by regular routes, the passengers by them could be watched with comparative ease. By putting the

diamonds in a place of safety until the affair of the robbery had blown over, Johnstone made sure of them sooner or later ; but I have always thought that after burying the stones he had intended going on to Barkly as arranged, meeting me on the post-cart, and professing entire ignorance of the disappearance of the bag. In fact, he might have turned the tables by accusing me of the theft. The hotel being within easy distance, he probably went there to have a drink, took more liquor than he intended, and as it was then too late to carry out his original intention of going to Barkly, got up on the first wagon that passed on the way for Kimberley.

I greatly astonished Piet on my return to camp by telling him I was going away at once, and that I would make him a present of the tent and all the other sundries lying about. In fact, I had to repeat it twice before I could get him to believe what I said. Very likely he thought the white man had gone mad, but I felt it was an occasion on which I could afford to be generous.

I could have sold the diamonds in Kimberley, but thought I might dispose of them to better advantage in London. Besides, a fit of home-sickness had come over me, so I took the first coach for the south, *en route* for home.

I had several offers for the large stone, subsequently disposing of it for twelve hundred and fifty pounds, and I realised over five thousand five hundred pounds by the sale of the remainder of the diamonds, less one nice stone which I got cut and set in a ring as a memento of my luck at the Vaal River Diggings.

FINDING OF THE WHITE LAMA.

A STORY OF TIBET.

BY LIEUT.-COLONEL A. F. MOCKLER-FERRYMAN.

T is many years now since the newspapers contained the following announcement: 'On the 21st of August, drowned in the Upper Indus River while on a shooting expedition in Ladak, Harold Raymond Breakspear, Captain Bengal Lancers, only son of the late Major-General H. A. R. Breakspear, H.E.I.C. Forces, aged thirty.'

The circumstances connected with Captain Breakspear's death were made known to his relatives by the India Office (where full reports had been received from the officials in India), and may be described in a few words. The gallant Lancer had obtained six months' leave for the purpose of shooting in the outer Himalayas; and his brother-officers had received from time to time letters from him containing details of the excellent sport he was enjoying among the wild yak and *Ovis ammon*. Towards the close of his leave a letter arrived announcing that he was marching towards Leh, and expected to be back with his regiment within a month. His leave, however, expired; and, as he had not returned, a special report was made of his absence. Then came a despatch from the British Resident at Srinugger, forwarding

another from the authorities at Leh, in which Captain Breakspear was reported as having been drowned in a tributary of the Indus near the village of Basgo. A court of inquiry had been held, and from the evidence elicited it appeared that on the captain's arrival at Basgo, on the way from Leh to Srinugger, a Bhoti *shikari* had come to the camp and told the Englishman that, by making a slight *détour* from the main route on the following day, he could obtain some excellent sport with two or three large herds of ibex. Accordingly next morning Breakspear gave orders for his men to proceed to the forward camp, while he, going round with the Bhoti *shikari* to the ibex-ground, would join them in the evening. This he failed to do; but late at night a lama from the Basgo monastery came into the camp with the news that, from the upper story of the monastery, he had witnessed the accident which had happened to the Englishman and his *shikari*. They were crossing the *jhula*, or swinging bridge, which spans the gorge below the monastery, the *shikari* leading; and when about the centre the Englishman suddenly slipped, his whole weight being thrown on to one of the handrail ropes, which snapped beneath the unwonted strain, thus hurling the unfortunate man into the seething whirlpool in the gorge below. Almost at the same instant the *shikari* met a similar fate, being jerked off his feet by the violent motion given to the bridge by the accident that had occurred behind him.

This evidence the lama repeated before the court at Leh, and a second lama corroborated the statement, affirming that he also had been a witness of

the accident, and had himself mended the broken rope on the following morning. It is perhaps needless to say that the bodies were never recovered, as the immense volume of water flowing under the bridge and the numerous rocks in the torrent made it more than probable that the two unfortunate victims were speedily dashed to atoms. The court, having fully considered the evidence, came to the conclusion that there were no grounds for imagining foul play, though suspicions were aroused when it was known that, two days before the accident, a leather-covered *kilta* containing the Englishman's personal belongings had been stolen from his tent while he was out shooting. Every attempt was made to discover the thief, and the empty *kilta* was eventually found lying in a rocky ravine; but its contents were never traced, neither was it known for certain what it contained. The world accepted the account of Captain Breakspear's unfortunate end. His brother-officers mourned the loss of one who had been a thorough sportsman and a brave soldier, and two or three officers, following in his footsteps, visited the scene of the accident. But in a few years the whole affair had passed into the region of tradition.

The Himis Lamasery is well known nowadays to Englishmen visiting Ladak for its annual festival, at which usually two or three are present; and they are always accorded a hearty welcome by the priests, who seem to be much gratified at what they represent as an honour. The summer of 189— was no exception to the rule, two young Indian civilians having accepted the invitation of the Wuzir of Ladak to

accompany him to the festival. These were Keane and Gillmore, both of the Bengal Civil Service, and they were quartered in one of the lofty towers of the *gompa* set apart for guests. They had already been shown the wonders of the interesting monastery, and had just returned to their chamber, on this their first night, from witnessing a grand parade of masked lamas, when Keane's Indian servant entered with the announcement that some one wished to speak to them. The stranger was immediately admitted, and proved to be a tall, thin priest, clothed in the red toga-like garment of the Dukpas. Advancing towards the Englishmen, his expressionless face telling them nothing, he silently knelt down and bowed his head to the ground at their feet; then assuming a sitting position, he produced from under his clothing a small bundle wrapped up in the same material. From the innermost folds he brought forth a letter, which he handed to Keane, muttering at the same time a few incoherent words. The letter was written on rough brown bark-paper in a curious un-English-looking hand, but apparently by an Englishman. It was addressed, 'To any Englishman at the Himis Festival,' and its contents were mysterious to a degree. Keane read it aloud to his companion :

'I am sending this by a faithful friend. If it should reach the hands of an Englishman, I beg that he will grant my request, great though I know it to be. I am lying, at the point of death, several days' journey from Himis, and my dying wish is to grasp the hand of a fellow-countryman once more. There is absolutely no danger in coming to me, and the bearer will be responsible for the safety of any one

who shall be charitable enough to cheer my last hours. It is, however, necessary, for reasons which I will explain afterwards, that only one person shall accompany my messenger, and he must place himself fearlessly and entirely in the hands of his guide. He shall return safely to Himis within a week at most.'

The two men looked at each other in silence; the lama was staring blankly first at one man's face and then at the other's.

'Is that all?' asked Gillmore.

'Yes,' replied Keane. 'What do you make of it?'

'Absolutely nothing. Let us go and consult the Wuzir.'

They motioned to the lama to remain where he was, and, taking the letter with them, they proceeded to knock up the Wuzir, who had already gone to bed in the next room. The Wuzir listened intently to the whole story, then gravely shook his head. 'It is extraordinary,' he said. 'I suppose it is a sahib shooting in one of the valleys; he has probably met with an accident. I will go and interview the messenger.'

Ten minutes later he returned saying that he had failed to extract much information from the lama, who referred him to the abbot of the *gompa*. Late as it was, the Englishmen persuaded the Wuzir to seek an audience of the abbot and endeavour to solve the mystery. The lama accompanied him, and after an absence of upwards of an hour they were heard ascending the long rock-cut staircase. The Wuzir's face wore a troubled expression, and to the eager inquiries he vouchsafed the reply, 'The

mystery remains as great as ever. I was forced to take an oath not to reveal all the abbot told me; but I am at liberty to say that the reliability of the lama who brought the letter is unimpeachable; that an Englishman is dying in a distant lamasery; that he is not a sportsman on a summer visit, but has been in the country for upwards of forty years. Of course you can, if you choose, send back a message by the lama, or if either of you will undertake the journey, I myself, knowing what I know, will vouch for your safety.'

Keane and Gillmore sprang to their feet simultaneously, each asserting his readiness to accompany the lama; but as only one could go, they tossed up, the choice falling on Gillmore. The result was communicated to the lama, whose parchment-like face still showed no sign either of approval or the reverse. He, however, turned to the Wuzir and addressed him in the Bhoti language, which the Wuzir interpreted briefly: 'He wants to know if you can be ready in half-an-hour, as he says it is important that you should make a start before daybreak. He has three ponies waiting outside the walls of the *gompa*, two for riding and the other for such light baggage as you want to take; and you had better provide yourself with eatables for a few days, unless you are prepared to live on the food of the country.'

Gillmore agreed to be ready within the time, and he and Keane at once busied themselves with the preparations, packing everything into two light bags. At 4 A.M. the little party was standing outside the walls, watching the lama, by the dim light of an oil

lamp, placing the baggage on the pack-pony; five minutes later Gillmore had shaken hands with Keane and the Wuzir, and was riding along close behind his guide, wondering what was the meaning of it all. Never in his life had he experienced such a long and dark hour as the one before dawn on this morning. The track along which his guide was conducting him was strewn with large and loose stones, over which the ponies constantly stumbled; the morning was cold, and Gillmore was so sleepy that it was with the greatest difficulty he was able to sit in the saddle. At length a glimmer of light commenced to appear in the heavens; then the country around gradually became visible. The lama was jogging along, with his left hand on the reins and his right assiduously twirling a prayer-wheel, an operation which he alternated with bead-telling during the greater part of the journey. The monastery was no longer in sight, since they had crossed over into a valley to the southwards, up which they had ridden for two weary hours.

The scenery of this part of the Himalayas is dreary and monotonous in the extreme; in all directions stretch long ranges of brown, rock-strewn mountains, capped with eternal snow, and intersected by deep valleys, whose steep sides, in places almost perpendicular, descend to the torrent of snow-water which rushes between the mighty boulders lying in the bottom. It is all one vast interminable wilderness, uninhabited save by the small colonies of lamas, who have for countless ages established themselves in their almost inaccessible monasteries, often several days' journey apart.

For five continuous hours the three ponies picked their way over the rough path; then a halt was made for breakfast, while the sturdy little beasts were allowed to graze on what scant herbage cropped up between the rocks. The lama was not an interesting companion; and Gillmore was denied even the relief of conversation, the Bhoti knowing no language but his own, which of course was unintelligible to the Englishman.

How many days this was to continue he could not conjecture; but, as if reading his thoughts, the lama solemnly opened a bundle and handed him a letter similar in appearance to the first one. Its contents were brief: 'This will be given to you by your guide when he considers that he has brought you to a spot from which it will be impossible to find your way back. I thank you most sincerely for undertaking the journey into the great unknown. Your first guide will leave you at the end of the first day's march; the second guide at the end of the second day; the third guide will bring you to me on the third day. Do not be afraid of anything they may order you to do. It will be all necessary. The last two guides will understand Hindustani. I trust I may be alive when you arrive.'

The receipt of this note was a great consolation to the traveller; he knew now the approximate length of his journey, and he had the satisfaction of knowing also that on the morrow he would at any rate be able to talk. The guide had so far done his work well; and the various intricacies of the mountains through which they had been wandering made it quite certain that Gillmore could not possibly retrace

his steps to Himis alone. The track was often quite invisible, and passed now to the eastward, now to the westward, though the general direction of the day's march was south. The same bare country was traversed throughout the day, and by sunset the traveller estimated that he must have covered nearly fifty miles; but where or when the lama intended to halt for the night he had no idea. Darkness came on apace, but still there was no sign of the end of the tedious ride; then, without warning, the guide set up a weird and loud wailing, which echoed again and again from side to side of the deep valley. In time came an answer back out of the depths of the gloom, and again all was silent, as the march was continued. Suddenly a sharp voice rang out like a sentry's challenge, and the lama replied; then a figure issued from behind a rock, and a hurried conversation took place between the new-comer and the guide.

After a while the two men approached Gillmore, and signed to him to dismount; no sooner had he done so than a twisted fibre rope was tied round his waist, and the guide gave forth a long dismal cry resembling the night-call of the jackal. The rope tightened, and the astonished Englishman instinctively raised his hands above his head and clutched the cord by which he was now suspended in mid-air. What was about to happen to him he knew not; but he felt that he was being pulled rapidly and steadily upwards. The sensation was not altogether unpleasant, though the rope was somewhat rough to his hands and tight round the waist. Towards the end of this adventurous ascent the

motion became more rapid, and at last, to Gillmore's intense relief, he felt himself seized by half-a-dozen hands, and his half-numbed body was laid on the floor of a room while the rope was untied.

The chamber in which he found himself was well lighted and bright, and he was received by a pleasant-looking lama, who told him in Hindustani that this was to be his room for the night. Gillmore was delighted at being able to talk again, and plied his host with numerous questions. The answers he received were short but satisfactory, though he was unable to discover the name of the lamasery at which he had arrived, who the mysterious Englishman was, or where he would be found. Gillmore was well looked after, and was given a good dinner, with a plentiful supply of *chong*, and a comfortable bed for the night, his new friend warning him, on taking his leave, that he would be aroused before daybreak, and that the following day's journey would be a long one.

The night's rest was all too short, and it seemed as if hardly an hour had passed when Gillmore felt himself shaken gently, and the lama, standing over him, bade him get up and dress. With the rope secured round his waist, he departed from his strange lodging as he had come, being slowly lowered down the precipitous cliff, which stood out above him in the descent bold and black against the starlit sky. At the bottom the ponies stood ready saddled. The rope, when released from his body, passed swiftly up the cliffside, to come down again immediately with the Hindustani-speaking lama—the guide for the day's journey.

As on the previous day, the ride was over rough and stony ground, though the monotony was relieved to some degree by conversation. For a Tibetan, the lama was decidedly loquacious, and, having formed one of a party that had been despatched to India on a religious mission some few years before, was in a measure enlightened and intelligent. He discussed his religion freely with the Englishman; and, though only belonging to the working or worldly class of lama, he appeared to be well versed in matters with which his spiritual brethren alone concerned themselves. Towards evening the pathway suddenly descended into a wide valley watered by countless streams from the mountains; a rich verdure spread for several miles, and parties of red-clothed lamas were busily engaged in agricultural pursuits. This, the guide said, was known as the Golden Valley, and belonged to two lamaseries situated at a distance of several miles. At the far end the streams fell into the lake lying in a basin hemmed in on all sides by high mountains; and beyond this point there appeared to be no passage.

‘We leave the ponies here,’ said the lama, turning to his companion. ‘You are now about to enter the Stronghold, which no stranger is allowed to enter under any pretext whatever. In your case, however, a special permit has been granted by the Holy Shooshok, in consideration of the object of your journey, and you will be passed over the frontier blindfolded and carried by the guard. Fear nothing. I will see that no harm comes to you.’

The two men then dismounted, and the Bhoti, drawing two strips of *puttoo* from his saddle-bag,

told Gillmore that his instructions were to tie his hands behind his back, as well as to bandage his eyes. This done, the same weird jackal-cry that he had heard on the previous evening echoed among the hills, and on the instant a succession of similar calls, mingled with the loud barking of dogs, answered from every direction. An interval of several minutes passed; then came the sound of voices, followed by a number of questions, to which the lama-guide replied. Everything was apparently satisfactory, and the Englishman felt himself lifted off the ground by two or three strong men, to be immediately carried rapidly along what seemed to be a fairly level though rough road. In ten minutes or so he was set down again, and a long discussion took place between his carriers, resulting in his being seized by the legs and hoisted aloft to sit on the shoulders of two men walking side by side. What this new mode of progression meant it was hard at first to discover; but after a while the astonished Gillmore learned by the sound that his bearers were wading in deep water. Suddenly the air became chilly and raw, and the splashing of the water reverberated in what was undoubtedly a subterranean chamber. The air grew colder and colder as the journey continued, and it was with no small amount of comfort that, after rather more than half-an-hour, the traveller found himself standing on dry land in a warmer atmosphere. His troubles were not yet over, however, for he was again carried up a steep incline for some considerable distance, and then down again for almost a similar distance, after which he was placed gently on a rock in a sitting position. He heard the sound of his

bearers' footsteps rapidly fading away; then, when all was quiet, the lama-guide spoke to him, and untied the cloths which bound his hands and eyes.

On looking round Gillmore discovered that he was in a narrow gorge, with sides rising perpendicularly for apparently several thousands of feet; down this he and his attendant slowly wended their way, arriving shortly after dusk at a huge gate in a massive stone wall built across the end of the gorge, and completely blocking the exit.

Once more the jackal-signal was given, and the gate was opened. Several large mastiffs strained at their chains, and two armed lamas received the travellers, who were at once conducted to a small *serai* on the inside of the gate. Here, in an inner room, as on the previous night, Gillmore was accommodated with food and a bed; his guide on the day's march set down the baggage which he had carried down the gorge, and after a little while brought in the guide for the following day's journey.

Fresh ponies were provided in the morning, and, as usual, an early start was made. Nothing of interest occurred for several hours, the way lying for the most part across an open sandy desert, over which ever and anon arose a succession of mirages; while occasionally a herd of antelope was to be seen scampering across the plain, the animals' bodies projected by the shimmering heat-waves to a height of several feet above the ground. The hills were reached again at noon; and in another hour the guide halted on the summit of a snow-pass, and, pointing down the valley, exclaimed, 'Yonder stands Tscho Pangi, our destination.'

It was a most striking view that presented itself to the eyes of the Englishman. From where he stood the country sloped gently down into a wide valley, the perpetual snow-line ceasing half a mile below, when its place was taken by a long stretch of cultivation, now bright and green with springing corn. Beyond lay a lake of vast expanse, bounded on two sides by mighty mountains, its farthest extremity, however, being invisible. The scenery was not altogether unlike that of the Golden Valley, except that the lake was of far greater extent, and the picturesqueness was increased a hundred-fold by the strangely situated *gompa*, standing perched, a thousand feet above the water, on a rocky islet in the lake.

On the margin of the lake they were met by a small body of armed men, who, after taking charge of their ponies, led them to a large barge quaintly painted in red and gold. This the whole party entered; and the lamas, bending to the oars, soon covered the mile of water which separated the island from the shore. Landing-place there was none; one huge solid rock rose out of the depths of the lake, its sides being round, perfectly smooth, and perpendicular for a height of two or three hundred feet; above this appeared fissures and clefts, with here and there a gnarled and twisted juniper-bush; then followed further lofty precipices, surmounted by massive projecting rocks and built-out platforms, on which stood the lamasery itself. No more impregnable fortress could be devised, as Gillmore had every opportunity of judging for himself during the ten minutes that he was suspended over the water by the rope which had been lowered for him.

The end of the toilsome journey had come, and a strange feeling of suppressed excitement took possession of the man who had undertaken to fulfil the wishes of his dying countryman. A large number of solemn *gelupkas*, or lamas of the yellow order, with shaven heads, stood on the platform by the prayer-mill windlass which was combining the double office of rope-winder and prayer-maker; and as Gillmore was released they formed themselves, without uttering a word, into a procession, to precede him along a dark rock-hewn gallery ending in a flight of steps. Up these they moved until they reached the top-most chamber of the *gompa*, a square and spacious apartment, with windows opening from all four walls and letting in the long golden rays of the setting sun. In the centre, on a low wooden couch, lay the dying man, clothed in yellow robes. Within easy reach of his outstretched hand was a heavy prayer-wheel, pivoted between floor and roof, and slowly revolving—the only sign that life still flickered in the otherwise motionless body. Silently the lamas knelt round the cot, and with bowed heads muttered a prayer; then one of them gently touched the prostrate form, and whispered that the Englishman had arrived. The effect was electrical; the man raised himself, and, shading his eyes with his hand, stared at Gillmore; then, motioning to the lamas, he murmured, ‘Brothers, leave me for a space.’

The two Englishmen were now alone, and Gillmore, kneeling by the bedside, took the thin bony hand in his and kissed it. The face before him, pale, wan, and wrinkled though it was, still had the unmistakable features of a European; otherwise there

was nothing to show that the dying man was not an ordinary Bhoti lama.

‘Thank you a thousand times for coming,’ began the English lama, clasping Gillmore’s hand. ‘I had the wish, and my brethren were good to carry it out. I believe they love me, as I also love them ; but they know that though I am their head I am not of their people. My time is short. I cannot talk much ; but I have secretly written out my history on scraps of paper which I have here under my pillow. Take them ; but be careful that they are not discovered on you. Promise me that you will remain with me till I die, and hold my hand in yours. It will not be long now. *Om mani*’——

The opening words of the sacred verse were uttered in a loud, clear voice. Gillmore heard hurrying footsteps on the stone stairs ; and, just in time, he secured the papers from beneath the pillow and thrust them into his breast. The priests entered the chamber and took up the low wailing chant, ‘*Om mani padmi hum*,’ but too late ; the soul of the white lama had flown to prepare for its re-birth on the morrow.

Four days later Gillmore was seated with Keane and the Wuzir in the latter’s house at Leh, engaged in answering questions, after an enthusiastic greeting on his safe return, and at the conclusion of a general description of his extraordinary experiences.

‘You have not told us the name of the white lama.’

‘For the very good reason that I never learned it ; but I dare say it is in his confession, which I have

been afraid to look at as yet. I carried the papers next to my skin on the return journey, and hardly slept a wink, fearing that they would be stolen from me. Here they are. Let's have a look at them.'

'Not now,' said the Wuzir. 'Take my advice, and keep them safe until you get out of this country. I am as much interested in the story as either of you; but I know what a hold their religion has on the lamas. Probably the mystery of the white lama is known well enough in the country, and if it were suspected that the secret was discovered Buddhist fanaticism might rise to the occasion. I am certain that in a similar case we Mohammedans would stick at nothing.'

So it came about that Gillmore continued to carry the papers on his person during the march back to Srinugger; and, as the Wuzir was as inquisitive as either of the Englishmen, he contrived to find some urgent business which required his immediate presence in the Kashmir capital. It was a month later when the two friends met to open the mysterious manuscript—a month every night of which had been a sore temptation to Keane and the Wuzir; but Gillmore guarded the treasure jealously, arguing that he had undergone immense toil and severe hardships, and that it would be a thousand pities if the white lama's history should run the risk of being lost forever by impatient curiosity.

Never did three conspirators meet with more pent-up expectancy; and as Gillmore laid the packet before him on the table the others stood round him to assist in the reading. It proved no easy matter. The writing was in parts barely legible, the English

was faulty, and now and again failed altogether, the writer passing into Hindustani and Pali. With the latter he seemed most familiar, and here the Wuzir came to the front, translating the passages readily. Before midnight the whole manuscript had been deciphered and converted into English, Keane carefully writing it down, and finally reading it slowly and aloud :

‘I, Sariputra, Priest of Buddha, Spiritual Head of Tscho Pangi *gompā*, knowing that I am about to pass hence to my next re-birth—whether in this world or in another planet no man can tell—desire to make known the story of this worldly passage which is just closing. Why should I have this strange desire ? It is because of a vision that has appeared to me. By reading my somewhat strange history, the people of whom I was born may be drawn towards the beautiful religion which has brought knowledge, calm, and peace to one who formerly was ignorant, sinful, and without merit. The way of the Noble Eightfold Path is long and accompanied with endless trials and vicissitudes ; but there lies beyond it the acquirement of the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths of the Lord Buddha, by which alone the number of re-births can be reduced and the attainment of Nirvāna hastened. Listen, O ye men of the outer world ! to the words of Sariputra, once living in the downward course, but now dying to enter on a more meritorious existence. Listen and take heed ; live apart and meditate, so that the knowledge of the miseries of your existence may be given you.

‘Let me begin at the beginning. I write for

my fellow-countrymen, and to attain my object I must be clear throughout; but they must remember that I write under difficulties and secretly, for my brethren would never permit the communication. I have devised a plan for placing my story in the hands of the outside world. Whether it will succeed I cannot say; but if it does succeed, and if these writings be read, then shall I have made an endeavour to arouse the world to a sense of its sinfulness.

‘The name by which I was known for the first thirty years of my life was Harold Breakspear—how strange it sounds! My father was an Indian General, and commanded a brigade in the Sikh war, where I myself was his aide-de-camp. Subsequently I entered the Bengal Cavalry, and for several years lived solely to enjoy myself, being devoted to what was called “sport.” When a young captain of thirty I visited this country on a shooting expedition, and through thoughtlessness committed a crime which led to the commission of a second crime, for both of which I was swiftly condemned to pay the penalty.

‘The first crime, as I have said, was committed thoughtlessly, yet it was nevertheless theft and sacrilege. I was travelling into the valley of the Changchenmo River, and camped for the night in the fields beneath the *gompa* of Chimray, close to several *chortens* containing the bones of sainted lamas. In a niche in one of these I observed a tiny image of Siddartha Gautama, studded with precious stones; and in an evil hour I set my heart on adding it to my collection of curiosities. In the stillness of the night I crept silently to the *chorten*, and after

some difficulty managed to find my prize, which I bore back in triumph to my tent. Closer inspection told me that it was of great value, since it was composed of solid gold, in which were embedded what were undoubtedly the richest gems, though rudely cut. The theft troubled me little, as I had frequently taken part in the looting of temples in Indian warfare; and, packing the image away at the bottom of a *kilta* which I kept locked, I forgot the whole incident.

‘Three months passed, and the time came for my return from the wilds. I camped again at Chimray, and visited the *chortens* in hopes of further booty, but without success. Then I travelled through Leh towards Srinugger. At Leh I repacked my baggage, taking care to place the precious image at the bottom of the *kilta* containing my books and private papers. Two days later the *kilta* was stolen from my tent; but, disgusted as I was, I was afraid to make a commotion in the village. The recovery of the stolen property would have disclosed my own theft; and under the circumstances I thought it best to let the matter drop. On arriving at Basgo I was visited by a Bhoti *shikari*, who talked much of shooting, and who assured me that he would show me good sport if I would accompany him next day across the river. This I agreed to do, and shortly after daybreak we were making the best of our way up a stony ravine on the far side of the river. Then we descended into another ravine, at the bottom of which four lamas suddenly appeared from behind a rock; at the same time my *shikari* turned to me with a grim smile and said, “These men have come

to take you for stealing the Golden Gautama of Chimray." Seeing that I had been entrapped, I placed my back against a rock, and raising my loaded musket, told them that I would shoot the first man who approached. Nothing daunted, my *shikari* seized a large stone, hurled it, and rushed in on me. In self-defence I shot him dead. The four lamas saw their opportunity, and, before I could reload, overpowered me and quickly bound me with cords.

'We were then some miles from the monastery, to which it was evidently not intended to convey me until nightfall, for I was carried by two of the men to a cave about half a mile distant, whither also the corpse of the *shikari* was brought, and laid by my side. Here I lay, bound hand and foot, all day; and at dusk the four lamas formed a solemn procession, two carrying myself and the others carrying the corpse. I asked to be allowed to walk; but, evidently fearing to unbind my feet, they refused my request, and it was some hours before we reached the gate of the lamasery. Up a never-ending flight of steps, through labyrinths of long passages dimly lighted with flickering oil-wicks, now passing along galleries half-open to the night-air, up further steps, and down again into more passages, my jailers bore me weary and worn out. At length we arrived at a solid door in the side of the rock. The heavy iron bars and bolts were raised, and my aching body was put down on the floor of the dungeon. A small portion of food and water was placed in the corner of the cell, my cords were unloosed, and, to my horror, the corpse was set down by my side. The lamas withdrew after lighting a lamp, and I heard

the bars of the door fall into their strong sockets. Was this to be for ever, I wondered, or would the morrow bring release, or fresh horrors ?

‘Whether I slept or fell into a state of stupor I cannot say ; but after a lapse of what must have been many hours I was aroused by the clanging of the bars, and the door opened to admit two men with drawn swords. I was informed that I was summoned to my trial, and forthwith was conveyed through a succession of long dark corridors to a large hall, where I found assembled the *chagzot* and a number of high lamas.

‘The trial lasted for several hours, and I need only say that I was found guilty of sacrilege and murder, and sentenced to be tied to the corpse and to be burned with it. The stolen image was produced at the trial, as well as all my books and the remainder of the contents of my *kilta*.

‘I was taken back to my cell, but later was reconveyed to the hall of trial, where I was informed that my sentence had been reconsidered ; that the teaching of Buddha, as set forth in the Dhamma-pada, forbade returning evil for evil ; that I had sinned grievously, but that it had been decided that I should live to be taught the knowledge which alone led to salvation. To remind me of my sin, the Golden Gautama was to remain always in my presence, and several lamas were appointed as my teachers. The *chagzot* read from the holy books a lengthy exhortation, and admonished me that although the death-sentence had been remitted, I should have to pass through many trying ordeals, lasting throughout a period of many years ; that I might abandon for ever the

thought of escape or communication with the outer world; but that, if I proved myself studious and desirous of atonement, I had before me in the remote future a life of peace and spiritual comfort.

‘I was scourged before the assembly with sharp-cutting thongs of raw hide, and then handed over to my *guru* to commence my novitiate, which, though it lasted for a space of time covering fourteen annual festivals, remains in my memory not so much by reason of the hardships that I underwent as for the eventual knowledge that I acquired. I passed through the ordeal of fire and the ordeal of water. I practised, for months at a time, *hathayoga*, *bhakti-yoga*, *pranayam*, and the like; I spent nights in the bottomless pit. I studied deeply of the Pitakas, and became proficient in Pali and Sanskrit; and all this time I was daily scourged in the presence of the stolen image. I received much praise from my teachers, and was eventually permitted to take my place as a working lama within the precincts of the monastery. After a while I obtained leave to practise *dhyana*, and became renowned in miracle-working, or *lokothra*. So great a power did I develop that the *chagzot* assembled his lamas and initiated me into the priesthood.

‘All desire to return to the world and my former life had long since left me, and I begged to be transferred to some secluded spot where I might be able to devote myself entirely to study and contemplation. I said that all desire to return to the world had been abandoned; yet this is not quite the truth, for during my novitiate I once took part in the Dance of Death at Himis, whereat an

Englishman was present, and I was sorely tempted to disclose my identity and seek his aid. But the temptation passed; and, from fear that I might be again exposed to its influence, I was ever anxious to retire into the more inaccessible parts of the country. My opportunity soon came, and after lengthy negotiations with Lhasa, I was moved across the border into Chinese Tibet, where I was received into the yellow priesthood as a minor lama of the Tscho Pangi *gompa*.

‘That was nearly twenty-five years ago, and from that day to this I have resided within the walls of the island lamasery. My story went with me to Tscho Pangi, as did the Golden Gautama, which I had long since come to regard as my saviour. It lived before my eyes to remind me of the past, and is still ever present in my mind; by day it rests in its niche in the wall, by night it lies clasped in my hand. There is little more to say. I acquired grace and knowledge, and I rose in the priesthood, until I became the head of my holy brethren. The expiation of my crimes was complete, and the pardon of the Delai Lama was conveyed to me by a special deputation of the highest lamas of Lhasa. I have begged and been granted one request—that when after death my body is consumed in the fire, my ashes shall be enclosed in an image resembling that of the Golden Gautama of Chimray. *Om Mani Padmi Hum. Oh! the jewel in the Lotus. Amen.*’

It was midnight when the Wuzir retired from the Englishmen’s room; but an hour later he returned, looking worried and excited. Keane was asleep, but Gillmore still sat smoking; and the Wuzir on enter-

ing noticed that a great change had come over him ; he was paler than usual, and his eyes wore a strange, hunted expression.

‘Why didn’t you tell us that you had taken it?’ asked the Wuzir, coming to the point at once.

‘Taken what?’ demanded Gillmore roughly.

‘The Golden Gautama of Chimray.’

Gillmore grew livid, and trembling violently, said in a whisper, ‘For heaven’s sake don’t speak so loud! How did you find out?’

‘In this way,’ slowly answered the Wuzir. ‘I have spent the last hour with three men from Tscho Pang, who accuse you of stealing the Golden Gautama from the monastery. They demanded that you should be sent back to Leh for trial. I have, however, arranged with them that you shall return the image and pay five hundred rupees to the monastery as compensation.’

‘All right,’ said Gillmore, thrusting his hand into the front of his coat and withdrawing a small packet; ‘there’s the beastly image; but I haven’t got enough money to pay the fine.’

‘I will lend you that, and you can send it to me when you get back to India.’

‘Thanks, you good old Wuzir; you have seen me through a very bad business, and I shall be ever grateful. Honestly, I could not help taking it; it looked so tempting lying on the ground at my feet when the white lama died; and of course I did not know its history then. You won’t catch me in Ladak again, for I don’t feel inclined to take over the Tscho Pang district—even with the prospect of Nirvâna.’

A MEMORY OF THE PRAIRIE.

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS.



IT was a bitter winter afternoon, though the air was clear and still, when Colville and I trudged beside our sledge across the white levels of the Assiniboian prairie. The snow seldom lies deep in that region, and the blue-gray smear of trail that stretched back straight as an arrow farther than eye could see afforded easy travelling to our brawny team. Thin steam hung about them; our breath froze on our furs; and, though walking nearly five miles an hour, we were not warm. The beasts seemed equally anxious to reach the shelter of the bluff we entered presently. The term 'bluff' in that country usually signifies a wood composed of wind-dwarfed birches.

We worked hard for some time before the sledge was piled high with slender logs, and then I noticed a frown on Colville's face as he leaned panting on the haft of his axe.

'There are those other sledge-tracks again, and this thing is beginning to worry me,' he said. 'I believe I hold sole right to the fuel in this bluff; though, as everybody knows I wouldn't grudge a neighbour all that he could burn, it's curious that whoever takes it should do so surreptitiously. Doesn't it strike you so?'

The straggling birches scarcely obstructed my vision as I swept my eyes thoughtfully round the great white circle. Nothing moved upon it; and, lying still under that frozen silence, all the land seemed dead. Then I looked at Colville, and because he faced the west the glare of sunset beat upon his snow-bronzed countenance. It was a masterful face, with nevertheless more than a trace of refinement. The clear-brown eyes matched the drooping moustache and sun-crisped hair, while the sinewy figure in the white-sprinkled furs had been developed to a fine symmetry by healthful toil. I do not think Harry was more than twenty-five; but he had taken hold with a strong hand, and fortune had favoured him. He was master of Brantholm, perhaps the finest homestead on that prairie, and for a time I had worked beside him through arctic frost and blinding summer dust with never an altercation. Still, when letters reached him from England at long intervals, he showed signs of bitterness; and I remember the curious look on his face when somebody at a political meeting called him a foreigner. Lifting his broad hat, he sent his voice ringing with his usual fiery impulsiveness across the assembly: 'It is true I was born yonder in the greatest country on earth; but is that a reason why I should not now render this good land which has prospered me the best service of brain and body?'

'I have noticed several curious things,' I said. 'First, that the trespasser picks blown timber and never fells a tree; secondly, that his sledge is always lightly loaded, and driven over the beaten tracks as though to hide its trail.'

I might have added that I had discovered the print of singularly small moccasins, but did not do so, being undecided whether certain vague suspicions were justified.

‘Well, I dare say we’ll find out some day; and it’s time we struck homewards now,’ said Colville, with a smile.

We plodded homewards through an unearthly silence and under an awful cold. The dusty snow dulled the beat of hoofs, and, because each piece of metal was wrapped in hide, sound itself seemed frozen. When that night we lounged in a state of delicious languor beside the stove, I remembered it had cost us several hours’ hard labour to cut that load.

Harry reopened the subject. ‘I’m not pleased about that wood-cutting; but it’s not the logs I miss,’ he said. ‘It is the feeling that whoever takes them must imagine I would grudge them which exasperates me. We are perhaps a trifle primitive, even brutal; but, thank God! no man need ever go cold or hungry on the prairie when his neighbour has plenty—which doesn’t seem to be the case in more civilised communities. There’s a story in that last newspaper which sickened me: an elderly military man I remember seeing at my father’s table was picked up dying—of starvation—in a London slum. I suppose the poor devil would sooner perish than proclaim his poverty.’

‘There are folks of that kind over there,’ I said. ‘When twenty harvesters a day strike you for a free meal, one begins to wish we had a few more like them here. By the way, I’ve sometimes wondered about the antecedents of our neighbour Ormesby.’

Colville's bronzed face flushed. 'I'm almost ashamed to say so, but I mentioned it to Carson when I wrote, and he gave me the whole history. Ormesby was partner in a patriarchal English country bank. Didn't trouble about business, but stuck to his hobbies: horses, big turnips, or something, and pigs. Brother and nephew ran the banking, and one of them was missing when the smash came. Wild-cat speculations; half the folk in that district ruined; and, though Carson says Ormesby was rather dupe than knave, the beggared tradesmen cursed him, and he came out here to hide his head. Eldest daughter was to have married a local magnate, who backed out forthwith.'

The story left me thoughtful. Ormesby, accompanied by his two daughters, had settled on partly broken land some time earlier, and the girls found a market at the settlement for minor produce. The elder one disappeared shortly after harvest, which was a failure, and the broken-down gentleman, shrinking from all intercourse with his scattered neighbours, lived as a recluse. Harry, I knew, had ridden over with presents of the kind freely exchanged thereabouts, but returned crestfallen. On the last occasion I saw him savagely fling the sundries broadcast across the prairie.

'The old man looks very shaky, and it must be a hard life for two delicately brought-up girls,' I said.

A week later I chanced to be in the post-office of the railroad settlement, twenty miles away, when Miss Miriam Ormesby came in. She was very young in appearance, fragile, and delicately pretty; but there

was a curious gravity upon her face. It was also a brave young face, and something in the poise of the shapely head and thoughtful steadiness of the fine gray eyes betokened a high courage as well as an acquaintance with adversity. The girl was dressed in thinly furred garments, and her cheeks were blue, while I noticed how her eagerness changed to relief as, opening the envelope handed her, she changed a slip from it for minted silver. Then, strolling down the snow-streaked street, I passed Ormesby's team. They stood shivering in the open, and no settler ever drove in from a distance at that temperature without putting up and feeding his beasts at the wooden hotel, where they then charged us a dollar.

I lay, pipe in mouth, upon a flour-bag, chatting with the keeper of the general store when chance sent Miriam Ormesby my way again. She came in diffidently, and while waiting I saw her eyes grow wistful as she laid her ill-protected hand upon some thick fur mittens. There was something pathetic in the gesture; and, feeling ashamed at having witnessed it, I was glad she did not see me. She purchased two dollars' worth of provisions, picking out the very cheapest kind, and I think the storekeeper's wife must have pitied her, for she shamefully cut the prices charged Harry and me, who purchased by the hundredweight. The whole proceeding was plainly an ordeal to the girl; and yet, though her lips would quiver as she considered the difference of a cent or two, she went through it with a childish dignity which, for some strange reason, made me feel that the use of unlawful language would be a relief. When she went out I turned to the store-mistress,

‘You won’t make your fortune in that fashion,’ I said.

‘No,’ was the cheery answer. ‘But we can always average up on the Brantholm bills. I’d have given her the lot with pleasure; but there are some of you folks from the old country no plain Canadian dare offer favours to.’

‘You try me next time,’ I said dryly. ‘By the way, what’s the list-figure for these mittens?’

‘Two dollars!’ was the answer, and the lady smiled. ‘Considering that they’re half the size of your hand, the price is one—to you.’

‘They are mine. Have I not a dozen fair cousins over-seas?’ I said.

The storekeeper’s wife dropped her voice a little. ‘My own girl would have been about her age had she lived, and I’m real sorry for that child,’ she said. ‘Did you see the cruel frost-wounds on her wrists? It’s my opinion the poor soul is doing a man’s work to keep her fool father’s place together.’

I went out with the mittens, and being a practical, unromantic person, wondered by what lucky means Miss Ormesby could be induced to accept them. I also fared as sumptuously as it was possible to do at the wooden hotel, but, perhaps from a sense of contrast, failed to enjoy the meal, and then started on my homeward drive across the snow-sheeted prairie. A league had been covered and it was almost dusk when, as I was leading the horses down the slope of a ravine, the shape of another sleigh appeared on the opposite grade. My wagon—for we used no fragile sleighs—moved on its runners silently; and, unobserved myself, I made out a girlish figure tugging at the horses’

heads. The beasts, however, appeared powerless to face the ascent, and presently the girl sank down on the bank beside them with a little despairing cry. It was darkening fast, cruelly cold, and she was nearly twenty miles from home. She started up with a shiver when I stood before her with lifted cap. 'Get right into my wagon and wrap yourself up in the fur robes before you freeze,' I said.

Miriam Ormesby appeared doubtful, but yielded with a faint sigh of physical content when I placed her among the thick robes by main force, while, after I had hooked a lariat to the other vehicle, my stout beasts hauled the worn-out team up the declivity. I sprang out near the summit, for a number of heavy sundries lay scattered about.

'How did these get here?' I asked.

My companion hesitated before she answered. 'It was the only way to help the team, and I—I carried them. But I fear they can't make the journey, and whatever shall I do?'

'Try to keep warm,' I said severely. 'We'll leave the beasts at Jasper's, and you'll get them to-morrow. You'll be getting supper snug in your house inside two hours from now, unless my team fall lame.'

Jasper snorted contemptuously as he took the horses. 'Guess the old frames wouldn't be worth nothing even to a cannery. They'd have laid down and died before they'd have fetched Ormesby's to-night.'

I did not, of course, tell Miss Ormesby this, though I quite agreed; but wrapped her closer in the furs, and pulled my own courage together for the bitter

drive. The breeze was in our faces, and it is under such circumstances the prairie-dwellers learn the meaning of utter cold. The girl must have started long before daylight, and it was not strange that presently her head sank until it rested on my shoulder, and she lapsed into what was either sleep or the stupor of exhaustion. I heaped more wrappings about her, and then, though it seemed an unwarrantable liberty, drew the thick mittens over her little stiffened hands. After this I remember little save the monotonous hiss and hum of polished runners and constant sprinkling of icy dust until a light blinked ahead, and I shook my companion gently as I reined in the team. She looked at me with some confusion when I helped her down, stammered drowsy thanks, and then held out her hands for the smaller packages with an appealing gesture.

‘It seems most ungrateful, but I fear I cannot ask you in to-night,’ she said.

I had hardly bowed in answer when she vanished, leaving me, partly pitiful, partly chagrined, to restart the team; and, reaching Brantholm half-frozen, I had hard work to keep awake while I told Colville as much as it seemed good for him to know.

The effect was startling, for he rose, saying with slow solemnity, ‘You were a lucky man. I would have given half my possessions to have changed places with you.’

I stared at him blankly, having never quite expected this.

‘You might have had my place for very much less, and would probably have let Miss Ormesby freeze while you talked nonsense. Thank goodness,

I'm commonplace in appearance and sentiment,' I commenced ; but Harry checked me.

'I can't stand your cheap-witted flippancy. For heaven's sake tell me what is to be done ! What right have such as you or I to own lands and cattle while that poor soul with the patience and face of an angel has not enough to eat ?'

'It resembles a somewhat ancient question, and at least we worked tolerably hard for them,' I answered dryly. 'There is nothing you can do but wait and pray for an opportunity. You have no reason for supposing the Ormesbys have not enough to eat ; and if you mentioned it I fancy a certain young lady's eyes would shrivel you. A comparative stranger can't send that kind of person provisions with his compliments.'

Colville groaned in a manner which suggested he had proved the truth of this already, and I left him, feeling slightly uneasy myself as to what would follow the discovery of the gloves. I was also glad I had not mentioned that the tracks made by Miss Ormesby's sledge resembled those found in the bluff.

Harry, who grew moody, did not reopen the subject, and some weeks had passed when an accident brought about the climax. A chinook-wind had thinned the snow, though there was still enough for sledging if one picked one's way, when towards dusk Harry and I drove homewards past the bluff. As we cleared the end of it a dusky shape suggesting a capsized vehicle loomed out upon the snow ahead, and Harry jerked his reins impatiently. 'We are going to see who it is that objects so strongly to taking a favour

from me, and I hope to relieve my mind a bit,' said he.

Wondering what he would say when he made the discovery, I kept silence until a smothered exclamation rose to his lips as he checked the team. A pile of heavy logs had fallen from the sledge beside us, and Miss Miriam Ormesby was seated upon one of them with the moccasin protecting one foot unlaced. She turned crimson as she saw us; but the colour faded suddenly, leaving her face marble-white again.

'I think it is a broken ankle,' she answered my question with a bent head. 'Some of the logs fell upon me.'

'Not worse than a sprain, I hope, but bad enough either way,' I said, while Colville drew in his breath as he stared first at the fragile, huddled figure, and then at the pile of wood. A hired man would have considered it a fair day's work.

'You must get into our sledge and drive with us to Brantholm before the frost nips the joint,' I said in the most paternal tone I could assume. 'Free those horses, Harry; they'll go home themselves; but first lift Miss Ormesby in while I hold the injured foot rigid.'

He stooped with infinite compassion in his handsome snow-bronzed face; and, though the girl seemed to shrink for a moment, she held out her hands to him. Perhaps she was a judge of character; and the master of Brantholm had very honest and kindly eyes. He lifted her into the sledge as carefully as though she were made of glass, and drove furiously until, when the silence grew oppressive, he asked, 'Is the pain very bad?'

‘No. You placed me so comfortably,’ said our patient, with a half-ashamed, half-grateful glance at him which he did not merit, for I had placed the foot. ‘But I do not deserve your kindness after—after taking your wood. Still, the other bluff was too far away, and my father has been ill. I hoped you would not mind very much.’

‘You loaded and hauled home fuel all winter from the bluff yourself?’ said Colville, aghast, as the full truth dawned upon him; and, when the girl blushed, proceeded to deny himself manfully. ‘Anybody can cut timber there; I have absolutely no right to it, for it lies nearer your house than mine,’ he said. ‘But surely, Miss Ormesby, you never did that brutal work entirely by yourself?’

I drove my elbow into his ribs, for Harry was blundering, and the girl smiled wanly as she answered, ‘My father was stricken by the cold when chopping two months ago, and there was nobody else.’

I was relieved when we reached Brantholm, and Mrs Thorkelsen, our Scandinavian housekeeper, stripped off the little moccasin; and, finding no sign of broken bones, I fixed the foot in an angular splint. Miss Ormesby, however, refused to wait a moment longer than was necessary; but Harry, who had been mysteriously busy, quietly insisted upon the whole of us accompanying her home. He was seldom much of an orator, and I do not remember what he said, though he used the old man’s illness as an argument; but I think few women would have refused to trust him, and our patient yielded with a swift, grateful glance which set his brown hands quivering, though

I hardly fancy he saw, or she meant him to see, all that shone for a second in her long-lashed eyes. Nevertheless, being older than either, I was warned. It was a long journey to Ormesby's sod-house, for the snow had partly gone and the sledge was heavy. Harry had packed it with many incongruous comforts besides provisions and some Californian burgundy, which was all the wine we had. When we reached the house the stove was almost out, and the room I blundered into dark and very cold. A person who lay almost unseen in a corner, breathing unevenly, called out in a strained voice at the sound of our approach, 'Have you come back quite safe, Miriam? I have been growing anxious. It is a very bitter night.'

Colville groped for the lamp, and when the light flashed across the room I saw Ormesby lying very gaunt and hollow-faced on a trestle-cot under what appeared to be a singularly inadequate covering. He was much older than one would have supposed from the apparent age of his daughters, and it needed no medical knowledge to see that he was very ill. He blinked at us vacantly; then his wrinkled brows contracted, and an impatient glitter came into his eyes as he surveyed the unexpected tableau: the fur-wrapped master of Brantholm busy at the stove, myself standing in a corner with a somewhat feeble smile on my face, and Mrs Thorkelsen, ruddy, tow-haired, and nearly six feet in height, helping forward his daughter, who seemed glad to lean upon her.

'Please help Miss Ormesby off with her things, Mrs Thorkelsen,' said Harry presently. Then, when the pair withdrew, he turned to the old man. 'Now,

sir, we owe you an apology for this invasion, and I must try to make it clearly. First of all, I am your neighbour Colville of Brantholm, and to-day we were fortunately able to render Miss Ormesby assistance while she was suffering from what we hope is a minor accident. It is perhaps not my business to tell you that what she has been attempting is a strong man's task; but this I will say: when any man is sick or hard pressed hereabouts his neighbours see him through. So, in no way as a favour, but for the credit of the prairie and our own reputation, we are bound to do what we can for you. Accordingly, we have made up our minds even to brave your perhaps natural resentment of our interference.'

Somewhat to my surprise, Ormesby, after a searching glance at the speaker, surrendered unconditionally.

'You are very good, and for my child's sake I dare not refuse,' he said. 'We lost the poor harvest I had staked my hopes upon, and my strength broke down. In fact—for worse losses have shaken me—I do not expect to recover; and, to explain what you see, I have set every possible dollar aside secretly to take my daughters back to British friends who might perhaps shelter them after I am gone.'

It struck me that this was highly prudent; but Harry answered stoutly, 'It is a sick man's fancy, sir. I shall have pleasure in helping you to sow a larger crop next spring. Your land is about the best in this locality, and it would be easy to plough it all on a share arrangement.'

Mrs Thorkelsen returned with her charge, and (for we had lost no time meanwhile) a homely banquet was soon set out beside the stove. The warmth and

wine and brightness, and perhaps the unusual sense of abundance, seemed to melt our new friends' reserve away, and even the sick man's spirits rose. In spite of an evident self-restraint, the way he ate was significant; but, though his daughter lay apparently well contented in an ox-hide chair, she touched very little in spite of Colville's pressing. He waited upon her with a homage whose absolute sincerity must have been apparent to all; but, though she smiled, at times she also shivered, and her thin face would flush in a manner I did not care to see. After an hour or so had passed she rose shakily, then caught at the chair-back and sank down again. Mrs Thorkelsen, who stooped, swiftly gathered her in her arms and strode lightly out of the room.

'It is the last straw. The poor lamb fever haf got, I think,' she said, to our consternation, when she returned presently. Harry, who was prompt of action, rose to the occasion, and by the time I had made a few arrangements and obtained the eldest Miss Ormesby's address, had our horses saddled.

'With the prairie just snow-dappled, neither wheels nor steel would serve, and we have got to ride our twenty miles to the railroad to bring a doctor in,' he said. 'It's a tolerably mean night, so to double the chances we both of us will start.'

It was a wise precaution. Thick darkness obscured the prairie, across which a cold wind loaded at times with powdery snow was moaning; though whether this came down from the heavens or up from the earth appeared uncertain. It was also seamed by ravines and sprinkled with badger-holes; but we rode recklessly at the best pace of our beasts, swing-

ing at a gallop across the levels, floundering with a crackle of tall grasses in the midst of the melting *sloos*, and smashing at times through tangled undergrowth as we reeled blindly down steep ravines in whose bottoms the honeycombed ice rang beneath us hollowly. Still, though we swung wide for nothing, it was not until, with the white flakes whirling round us, we crossed the ice-jam on Bitter Creek, whose alkaline waters were the first to burst their chains, that cold fear got hold of me.

We got across in safety, though there was crackling beneath us like musketry, and reeled into the sleeping settlement. Then Harry did what few men in the territories could have accomplished when he dragged the autocratic station-agent out of his bed and to his telegraph instrument.

‘Come out by Pacific mail. All costs guaranteed,’ ran one message to a Brandon doctor; and Harry turned to me as the second—to Miss Ormesby, Marsden’s dry-goods store, Winnipeg—clicked off.

‘That’s where the few dollars, probably all they had to live on, come from. And I’ve wasted as much over a handful of cigars in Winnipeg, Heaven forgive me! What selfish hogs we are!’ he said.

We had to stable and rub down our horses as a matter of course, and, because no hotel servant thereabouts would have made a bed for an emperor at that hour, lay down on the hay beside them until the standard breakfast-time. Then there followed a tedious waiting, until at last two great snow-packed locomotives hauled the Pacific express up out of the prairie, and we at once identified the Brandon doctor.

Also, there was no mistaking the handsome young woman with the anxious face.

‘Your father and sister are both ill, and I took the responsibility of sending for you,’ said Colville.

Miss Ormesby answered very quietly, ‘You did well. I have resigned my situation to attend them. I must thank you for having already lessened my anxiety, for I concluded from my sister’s letters she had only to ask for assistance in any emergency.’

That ride was my last active part in the little drama; but I think, considering all things, that Harry played his part well. At least, neither Ormesby nor his daughters suspected who it was that bought up a portion of his land at a ridiculously high price through a Winnipeg agent. Ormesby recovered a little; while long before the wheat his neighbours sowed for him was green Miriam had won back her comeliness and vigour, and I knew my sojourn at Brantholm was over. Once again I had seen the mingled light and haziness in her eyes as she listened to the voice of its master, and turned away with a sigh, half-envious, half-abashed; while by the time the wheat was tall and yellow I was on my way to British Columbia. Harry, of course, both fumed and protested; but, though we had toiled and won a hard fight together in stinging snowdrifts and under summer heat, I knew that, while our friendship would hold with life, he had now a better helpmate. I also knew a little of feminine nature. Still, I was glad that when they stood side by side in the little dépôt the last time I saw them, Miriam Colville’s eyes were very kindly as she waved farewell to me while the long cars lurched out. It is perhaps a trifling memory

to treasure in these prosaic days; but it may be a material force which leads to achievement, as well as a gracious influence, proceeds from the greatest of sentiments—charity; for, while Harry, the soft of heart and strong of hand, has doubled the Brantholm acres, I am still a wayfaring man.

A BOY'S FIRST FIGHT.

THE STORY OF WATERLOO.



I WAS a biggish boy of seventeen, and I wore a red jacket, and was skylarking one summer's morning with my companions in the yard of the farm where we were quartered. Some of us were busily hemming in a pretty little bit of an ensign on a pony, and trying to drive him into the abomination-pond in the centre of the yard, when a man looked over the gate and said quietly, 'There—leave off; there's better fun for you; the French are coming on.'

We had heard for the last week that about one hundred thousand of them were assembling within a few miles of us, and we were living on just as unconcernedly as most people do live on in this world in the midst of the hundred thousand unseen dangers which beset every path of life. Our child's-play was over; man's work was before us. We assembled, we marched; but not up the lane which led to our daily drill-ground; our heads were put the opposite way—whither bound we knew not, nor, I believe, did our leaders. The general of our division had some days before found out a goodly château, with a most convenient common near it, where he could exercise his men; and thither he went, taking us at least twenty miles from the place where we were supposed to be,

and close to the French frontier. We had now to rejoin the army without a moment's delay if we could, which was doubtful, for nothing definite was known as to the movements which might be taking place on either side.

The first sign of war I saw was a beacon by the roadside, which had been fired and partly burned down. There was no one near it. The hounds had been there, but there was no trace of them. After a tolerably long day's march, we were halted to rest on a nice bit of roadside common. Everybody threw himself on the turf, to make the most of the few minutes ; and all was quiet—strangely quiet.

What's the matter ? What are they listening to ? What are those old hands laying their ears to the ground for ?

Don't you hear the firing ?

No. Listen.

There ! No doubt about it.

Oh ! I can hear it quite plain. Musketry and heavy guns, too ! It's a general action ; they are at it, and we here !

You have seen hounds in cover when first they catch the scent—a mere suspicion, not yet to be confirmed by the tongue—how their bristles will rise and their whole frame quiver. So it was with the men ; they were transfigured. Those who a minute before were only trying to snatch forty winks had started to their feet, were gathering in little knots, speculating eagerly on what was to come ; but there was no noise beyond a busy angry hum.

The march was resumed, and continued steadily till dusk, when we halted just outside of a town and

hoped for rations. Instead thereof, there came rushing past a raw Irish regiment, shouting like madmen. The contempt with which our old soldiers looked down upon this noisy demonstration was quite beyond words.

On we went, in darkness, rain, hunger, and thirst ; on, on until, long after midnight, when the rain had become a deluge, we halted in a wretched hamlet, and were told to expect about three hours' rest but no food. I got into a stable, threw myself on some straw, my head on a saddle, and subsided into a sort of half-dreamy repose ; but others came in, and we began to discuss our prospects, under our breath, lest the men should hear—for it was believed that the French were between us and our army, and that our chance of rejoining it was a bad one. We were four in that stall, and gloomy enough. Two have long been in their graves, the third is a jolly old general, and as to me—never mind.

Day broke—the march was taken up. One of the men near me had got at drink somehow, and showed it. His own comrades attacked him angrily. He pleaded killing weather, fatigue, emptiness ; it was but little ; it could never else have got into his head, &c. ; but they would listen to no excuses. Drink, they said, was all very well at proper times—a capital thing, no doubt—but before the enemy, never ! He was a disgrace to the regiment.

The weather improved, and we woke up into better humour. Arriving at the brow of a little hill, we saw a single figure coming down the opposite slope towards us. A soldier—Belgian uniform—arm in a sling. ‘He has been in the

fray; now we shall know something.' But he could not make himself understood, seemed to have had quite enough of fighting, and was evidently making for his home. His wound was looked on as a sham, and himself as a deserter. He was hooted out of sight—nothing loath. About mid-day we halted in a pleasant meadow, and hopes were held out of rations. The officers of my company sent off one to a little town in sight to get something eatable. And now up came a lad, in high spirits at having carried his point, at any rate. He had been on leave at Brussels when the alarm came, and at once determined to make his way to his regiment. He had been walking all night, and having started as he was, in dancing-shoes, had soon worn them clean out. He had seen no actual fighting, and could only say that it had been heavy and the result doubtful. He told us Major ——, a staff-officer, who had been much with us and was universally liked, had lost a leg. 'Poor fellow! what a horseman he was! His hunting is over.' This was realising the matter to us—bringing it home to our bosoms. It was the first blow; but there was not much time to think of it. Our caterer returned with a large loaf like a life-buoy—a common shape then—smoking hot, and a bottle of curaçoa, both of which were disposed of in an instant. There were rations at hand, we were told; but time was too precious to wait for them, and we went on our way.

Presently there was a startling sound. Our suspicious imaginations made it a fire of musketry close at hand. It was only a long rattling peal

of thunder, the first of a long series of heavy storms.

Another alarm! On a rising ground some way off came into view a strong body of men. Were they friends or enemies? If the latter, they were too many for us. All right: they were allies; the risk of being cut off was at an end; we were up with the army. But where had we been wandering ever since yesterday morning? I never knew. I have in after-times often asked men who should have known, but never got an answer.

Once more we halted; the wagons with the meat actually came up; but it was announced that the French were close upon us, and there was not time to cook it. The meat was put back into the wagons, and the retreat—for such it doubtless was—went on. And now the plot began to thicken. On all sides were seen troops of various nations, hurrying on in the same direction as ourselves. The road became choked. Once, in a regular jam with some ammunition-wagons, a violent thunder-squall came on, and I began to speculate on the possible effects of a flash of lightning. We had to wait some little time, and I lay down in the long rye by the roadside. I was violently heated and thirsty, and refreshed myself by sucking the ears of corn, which were so drenched by the heavy rain that each was a sort of wet sponge.

The foreigners began to give out and lie down by the roadside in constantly increasing numbers. Most conspicuous among them were some huge Dutchmen with enormous beards—things not then usually worn. They made no attempt to conceal

their alarm, and I began to doubt how the feeling that our allies were good for nothing might affect our men. It was satisfactory, however, to see that they seemed to look upon it as unmitigated fun. The passage of any staff-officer was eagerly watched in the hope of picking up information. I overheard one say, in answer to some inquiries about our retreat, 'Oh, we sha'n't have to go much farther. He is going to make a stand at a place called, I believe, Waterloo, or some such name.'

Owing to the crowded state of the road, checks now became very frequent. On one occasion, hearing an odd kind of noise close to me, I looked up and saw a wagon of wounded men. It was utterly unexpected, and I only hope I did not show how it shocked me. Two figures I see now. One had been shot in the mouth; the whole face had swelled till the features were undistinguishable. It was one cake of blood, and where the mouth had been was a hole, from which came sounds that were not human. In contrast to him sat a very fine-looking man in a greatcoat, which concealed his hurt. His face was deadly pale, and wore an expression of great suffering; but he maintained absolute silence.

We passed through the town of Braine-le-Comte, which looked entirely deserted by the inhabitants. It was occupied by some foreign troops, who, we understood, were to stay and meet the advance of the French. One company got under arms at a sort of guard-house, in compliment to us, as we passed. They looked, officers and men, dismal—
forlorn without the hope. I could not help admir-

ing the endurance of our men. They had started about nine or ten on the morning of the 16th, and had been marching through drenching rain and violent storms until now, the afternoon of the 17th, with very trifling halts, and no rations. They had breakfasted before starting, and had little or no opportunity of picking up any food by the way (I had only my share of the hot bread and curagoa); and here they were, going on without apparent fatigue, and without a murmur. Well, all things come to an end. We turned off the road upon a rising ground, which showed other regiments forming line as we did. The position was reached; the march was over. As I was looking round to see what was coming next, I was accosted by an old Peninsular captain with a grim smile. 'Well, ———, here's the butcher's shop. How do you like it?' But the real butcher's shop came; we got the meat, and some spirits, and fed at last. I contrived to get a capital bundle of straw, and lay down (thatching myself with it, for the thunder-showers were constant) on a slope, from which I could see all that was passing. Before me spread one wide level, mostly in corn, with no enclosures or woods to break the view. Across it, at the distance of more than a mile, ran long lines of British cavalry, formed to cover our retreat. Beyond, in the distance, I could make out the French line. The guns I could not distinguish until they opened fire; then the smoke, settling in a little thunder-cloud above each battery, mapped them out. I could see the lines shifting, wavering, advancing,

retreating, but was too far off to make out anything more than that a skirmish on a grand scale was going on; then our side appeared to gain ground; and then the squall seemed over. There is a horseman coming from the fight, at speed, right towards us. He pulls up close to a party of our officers, throws the reins on his horse's neck, and bursts out a-laughing. His horse is in a lather, but he is in the highest spirits. This is the Duke of ———, a captain in our regiment, but serving on the headquarters staff; and he is laughing because he has just seen the Life Guards ride over the French. (He did not tell us, what we heard afterwards, that some of our light cavalry had first failed to do so.) What is that astounding rattle on the right? And what are all our fellows clapping their hands and shouting for, as if it were the best fun in the world? It is the whole baggage-train of the British army in a panic, fleeing for their lives along the paved road, bound for Brussels. And it is no joke at all. It is only fright now; but all through the night will be plunder and destruction—robbery and murder—women and children upset into the canals and drowned. The loss of life was great; the conduct of very many infamous. It was a shocking and disgraceful business; but it was hushed up. Victory, like charity, covered the multitude of sins; and in the ocean of our losses this drop was of no account. Again we stood to our arms and moved off, I carefully carrying my precious truss of straw under my arm. The two armies were in motion—in presence—in full view. The prattle of

skirmishers began, grew angry, died away. The sun, just before setting, came forth from his frowning host of storm-clouds, threw one wild gleam of light over the awful scene, and disappeared.

'Are we going to work now?' I asked the little fellow by my side, a boy in years, in service a veteran.

'Not to-night, I think; it's too late.'

'What a beautiful sight!—isn't it?' I could not help saying.

With a grave, sad smile of superior experience, he replied, 'Wait till to-morrow night; tell me then how beautiful you think it.'

We kept changing our ground, and at every move I lost some of my straw. As we blundered through the dark and wet, the last of it went before we came to our final position. Very quickly the opposite ridge was lighted up by the fires of the French army, making themselves happy for the night. What a range of them; and how I envied them! We had nothing of the sort. The fitful fire of outposts—every now and then like a small battle—burned out. The last sounds I heard were the constant rush of the rain and the constant wail of some poor creature near me. I had not so much as a greatcoat, but I slept what the French call 'the sleep of the just,' or what, according to the penny-a-liners, is quite as good, the sleep of the man who is going to be hanged to-morrow. On waking in the morning I found I could not have turned once the whole night, for the side next the ground was perfectly dry and warm. But that seemed all there was of me; the upper side, on which the

rain had been beating, had no feeling at all. The general effect was helplessness. (Some months after I saw at Ramsgate a young man in a wheel-chair, and was told he had been paralysed from exposure to wet the night before Waterloo.)

I was trying to shake myself up and be alive, when my kind captain came by. 'You look very ill,' he said; 'there will be nothing doing just yet a while; go down to that cottage. I have just come from it. You will find a fire there. Make yourself comfortable. You'll know by the firing when it's time to come back.' I went, and found a miserable hut—four bare walls and a mud floor. Crouching in the opposite corners of the hearth, over some smouldering embers, were an old man and a little boy, both crying bitterly. I sat down between them, made up the fire, found a crock of water and a few potatoes, and set to work to roast them—and myself. I made a hearty breakfast. Not one word passed between us; they crying, I eating and drinking, and rubbing my hands over the embers. But all was silent except the musketry, which more than once drove me to the door. 'I ought to go back; but, hang it!' said I to myself, 'this is too luxurious a fireside to leave yet.' At last came a burst of fire that allowed no further doubt, and away I ran back to my company, and was complimented on my good looks and my early return; for they said, 'Oh, this is nothing yet. You'd better come into the hut.' Our servants had by this time made a gipsy hut of boughs, with plenty of dry straw in it. Where they could have got either I have no notion; but

they were handy lads. Four of us tumbled in and pigged together. I dropped asleep instantly, and knew nothing more till I was roused by their jumping up, and I followed their example. Our general's aide-de-camp was walking his horse past; he turned his head towards us, and said very coolly, '*Enemigo!*' The one word of Spanish and the knowing smile told plainly that old times were come again.

Now for it, then!

Without signal or word of command, the men just walked to the piles of arms and formed their ranks.

Here comes the old quartermaster, radiant; he has got something good for us. Yes, a little very precious oil for the musket-locks; and the men seemed fully to appreciate the value of it—to feel that each man's life might depend on his piece not missing fire. Each proceeded to uncover and oil his lock; for I think there were none who had not contrived some protection against the rain. Very many had stripped off their woollen socks for the purpose. We got the word to 'load;' the ramrods rang, and a thousand rare soldiers stood ready for anything.

A short move brought us into our place; we formed close column. The men stood at ease; officers fell out and lounged about, chatting as at an ordinary parade. I noticed our adjutant, an old Peninsula man, lying down on his face as if asleep; but I could make out that he was saying his prayers.

We were just behind the ridge which formed our position, so that we could see nothing. A

pause. It seemed a long one; even those chatter-boxes, the skirmishers, were silent.

Bang! went an English gun on the ridge just before us; and, as if it were a spell that had raised legions of devils, gun followed gun, until all individual explosions were swallowed up in one wild roar, under which might be made out the sharp treble of the musketry. Clouds of smoke began to gather, and out of them, from time to time, darted a long, shrill French scream. The Americans in the Civil War appear to have prided themselves on what they call 'yelling,' to have reduced it to a system, and looked on it as an important branch of the art of war. But the English of that day did their bloody work, for the most part, in silence. The first cannon-shots sailed over us sky-high; but they soon began to fall unpleasantly near. If you sit by the open window of a railway carriage, and if, quite unexpectedly, an express train passes, you will hear something like a cannon-shot close to you. The first thing struck in our ranks was a horse. Prince Regent had cost over a hundred guineas only a few days before. It was only a graze. As far as I could see, it did not draw blood or break the skin. But it broke a bone; there he stood, with one leg hanging loose. The next was a worse case. Our sergeant-major was expecting his ensign's commission, and another sergeant was acting as his second, and daily looking for his promotion. The rush of a shot—near! nearer! Smack among us! A little bustle—one man down. It is the poor sergeant, his leg crushed. In a few minutes his life-blood was on the field, and he at rest.

Soon men began to drop faster; the enemy had got our range. The clever old soldier in command just moved us about twenty yards to the right. Such a change was repeated at intervals. I did not see any of the other regiments in the brigade doing so. Their losses were heavier than ours; and I have always attributed the difference to this simple but sensible dodge.

The wetness of the ground was much in our favour under this fire. Shells would sink so deep that they exploded either not at all or harmlessly, throwing up great fountains of mud. But there were marvellous escapes. I saw one fall at the foot of an officer, who, instead of getting out of the way, stood as if petrified; but it never burst. Another went into the ground just behind a man who was lying down; he rolled lazily over on his side, and began to scrape with his hand the hole it had made, as if trying to find it. That, too, did not burst. And just by me a shell struck a man's knapsack, exploded, and scattered it in all directions—tore it to smithereens without hurting the wearer, who stood gaping as if he could not understand why all his comrades were laughing at him.

Here comes our second in command, good Sir Rowland Hill, on a great fat coach-horse, and looking as if no less a creature could carry him. But the composure with which he and his staff walked past while the shot was dropping all around them was perfect. The storm was so heavy in front of us (Hougomont) that we began to think it high time something should come of it, and to feel,

rather than acknowledge, some anxiety on the subject. A group came slowly towards us from that quarter—six men carrying something in a blanket. We must have lost some officer of rank (it was General Cooke); for in those days men were not allowed, except in special cases, to leave the ranks to attend on the wounded while fighting was going on; nor were surgeons allowed to be under fire.

The next sufferer got along without help; it was a poor horse wandering slowly to the rear with his head hanging down, almost as if he were grazing. I thought at first there was nothing the matter with him, but as he came nearer I saw he had only half a head; a cannon-shot had carried away all the lower part. One of the men was ordered to take a musket and put him out of his misery.

There is a yell, worthy of America, a long way off. What can that be? Far out of the reach of shot was an immense patch of yellow, from which these fierce sounds proceeded. It was a body of '*braves Belges*' shouting to keep up their spirits.

At last up rode an aide-de-camp to our column; he was a very young one indeed, and in a very great fuss.

'Are the —— loaded?'

A chuckle from the ranks was the only answer. He muttered some hasty order, and was going off as fast as he came.

'Stop, stop, young gentleman!' says the colonel; 'don't be in such a hurry. Let us hear distinctly what you have got to say.'

It was an order to advance, and right gladly

we obeyed it; for idleness, a curse at any time, is at such times the hardest trial men can have. The first sight of the battlefield was rather a disappointment to me, though I don't quite know what I expected. Along the ridge, groups of figures were busy in the smoke. There were our guns. At intervals were masses of men, doing nothing. Small bodies of cavalry were riding about, and occasionally attacking one another. Altogether, it rather put me in mind of some of the stage directions in Shakespeare's battles: 'Alarums, Excursions—Chambers go off.' One little episode I almost hesitate to describe, because it does not sound at all like what it is—true to the letter. I saw it distinctly; it took place at a very small distance from me. Out of the smoke two small parties of cavalry—not above ten or a dozen in each—rushed into collision, as if unawares; pistol-shots were rapidly exchanged, saddles as rapidly emptied; away went the horses back into the smoke in various directions, not one rider left; and the whole was enacted in less time than you have taken to read it.

We took up the ground which had been occupied by the Black Brunswickers, and still was occupied by a large number of them, poor fellows! Very honestly had they been fighting; very thick they lay. Close to me was the body of an officer, quite dead. As it was a leisure moment and I had never had a fair view of a dead man before, I determined to take a good, steady look at him, and felt much the better for it. He was not disfigured—quite placid, but as yellow as any duck in the market.

We now formed not one but two squares, because

we were so strong—above one thousand bayonets. The French cavalry had by this time got possession of the field, but could never hold it; they came and went. Every now and then they would drive our artillerymen from their guns; I saw at one time seventeen guns in a row abandoned. The gunners, as well as all general and staff officers, would take shelter in the squares, just as you pop into a shop in a shower and beg leave to wait till the rain is over; and the squares became crowded with inconvenient guests. I remember one couple in particular, because the horse trod on my toes. He was a hot chestnut, but now sadly nervous—could not stand still for an instant. The rider was a curious contrast. His natural temper was one of the most irritable I ever knew; but a scene like this steadied him, and he sat like a statue. By-the-bye, I did not in one single instance see a horse in the rampagious attitudes which battle-painters are so fond of. No ‘Ha! ha!’ no mocking at fear. They are not the animals they were in Job’s days; or has gunpowder made the difference? They do sniff the battle, poor brutes! and realise the danger. Some, indeed, showed no unusual symptoms. Here and there (rarely) was a case of frantic fright. More frequently it was quiet quaking, shivering from head to foot.

And now our turn came; the cuirassiers were going to try us. Very calmly our colonel gave his directions, quite in a conversational tone. ‘Now, mind, men—no firing till I give the word, and I sha’n’t do that till they are within thirty yards.’ On they came at a trot—the ground was too deep

for any faster pace—officers in front cheering them on, as the French soldier expects his officer to do. It was mere murder. I do not think the distance could have been thirty yards, when a clear, gentlemanly voice said, ‘Ready! Present!’ A flash and a crack from the face of the square. A heap of them were down. ‘The rest they ran away,’ as the nursery rhyme has it. The cavalry tried us no more. A large part of that wonderfully fine body of troops was disheartened and wasted in such hopeless attacks; it was one of the great mistakes of that great day.

In our turn we advanced, still in square. We went over the ridge, and a little way down the slope. But the enemy were too many; we were in a perfect cloud of skirmishers, and a mark they could not miss—nearly surrounded by them. It was an ugly moment. There was a call for the Rifles, who were near us, to go at them; and gallantly the green-coats dashed into the skirmish. The two lines were almost hand to hand, without the slightest shelter. The Rifles dropped so fast that I thought they were done; but the French dropped faster, and were driven off after a short struggle, too deadly to last. It gave us relief; but we had to walk back—we did not run—to our old ground.

Soon after the square was reduced, and we formed line just behind the ridge. I was tall enough to see over it; and here began a long, long, weary stand. For want of something better to do, I got watching a French gun exactly opposite to me. The flash came in very regular time, and

then the shot would whiz right over my head and drop in the bottom of the valley behind among our allies. I was trying for an epithet, but the less said the better. Time after time savage screams of '*Vive Napoléon !*' would break out, announcing a fresh attack. Very fierce they were, long, destructive, and only not successful. They took the name of their god of battle in vain. A cannon-shot struck the ensign who carried one of the colours, smashed his raised arm and the colour-staff, and went through his heart. Without a word, he fell forward on the colour. A sergeant stepped up in his place; down he went instantly. Another succeeded, only to share the same sudden fate. There was a moment's hesitation before the next for duty took the deadly post; but the storm was over, and all through it the other ensign stood unharmed beside the dead.

Looking round to watch the flight of one of the shots going to the rear, I saw 'the Duke' quite close to me, and entirely alone, walking his horse slowly along in rear of the regiment, shot falling all around him. His expression of countenance was, if you please, immovable determination, but I am bound to confess it was the opposite of pleasing.

I had asked my brother-subaltern rather early in the day, 'Is this what you call much of a fight?'

'No,' he said; 'nothing very extraordinary.'

Some time after I repeated the question, and got a similar answer, but rather, I fancied, in a short tone, so I thought I had better not ask any more. But now he came up and whispered in my

ear, 'Well, I never did see anything like this.' So I felt satisfied. Presently a sergeant came round to him (our post was in rear of the ranks) and said, 'Please, Mr ——, come and take command of the company. Your brother's down, sir!' Without a word, without a change of feature, the young Stoic went and did it.

The persecution our poor captain underwent was singular. A grazing shot on the head knocked him down, stunned. While he was trying to get up on his knees, his back towards the enemy, a musket-ball struck the sole of his foot and made a bad wound. Staggering off as he best could, he leaned for a moment's rest against an abandoned gun; a cannon-shot instantly shattered the carriage of it, throwing him down, with no further hurt.

As soon as the fighting was over, his two brothers, both officers in the regiment, started off in search of him. For the greater part of that night they rambled over the ground we had been working on, in vain. They used to say it was too horrid a scene to talk about. At last, hopeless and worn out, they took shelter in a hut, where was only a French officer, shockingly wounded. They did what they could for him, got him a drink of water, and dropped asleep by his side. When they woke in the morning he was dead. They had to rejoin the ranks and march with us.

We know the lull that will occur in a gale of wind, until one really begins to hope it is over; but there comes a sigh, a sob, a breeze, gust upon gust, and the roar returns as if the spirit of the storm

were only bent on making up for lost time. There was more than one lull of this kind; but at no time would the noise make conversation inaudible, and any sound at all unusual would attract notice.

A slight but general groan from the ranks made me turn my head. I saw the colonel sinking back on his horse, and the men catching him. The groan was from them, a token of their affectionate regard almost unprecedented—the only demonstration of feeling I remember that day. The calm indifference of those 'red men' was like what we read of the Indians, but for a moment it was overcome. And he was a disciplinarian, too; the best I ever knew.

Well, things were undeniably looking bad, and growing from bad to worse. There were symptoms of exhaustion and discouragement, and not on the enemy's side. My neighbour touched my arm and, without a word, pointed to the right; there were men running, and they were English.

Right in our front the fire blazed up afresh, and the screams of '*Vive l'Empereur!*' growing more and more distinct, told of a coming attack. Our line was formed four deep, and (how, I do not exactly remember) we became aware that at last we were going to be sent forward—that the time was come for Greek to meet Greek. We woke up as from a dull and dismal dream to real life and action. We had as yet done nothing, except that little brush with the cavalry. For how many hours had we been suffering! Our losses, comparatively, had not been heavy; but the full and hideous effect of every shot that struck was displayed before us, and we had to stand and watch it hopelessly. It was as bad

as sipping your medicine, and that medicine the bitterness of death. But now the load was off us, the nightmare at an end. All the feelings so long pent up were loosened and working into fury. At last we were free to show what we too could do. But as yet there was no visible change; we still stood behind that ridge, not seeing the approaching column, and unseen by them. Our commanding officer, with two or three of the mounted staff, was on the brow watching the enemy. Now he is coming back to us; now he puts us in motion. As we topped the rise we had to break and pass between our guns, which ceased firing, the gunners cheering us as we went past—their sleeves tucked up, their hands and faces dreadfully blackened; and hot, reeking hot, they looked. They are passed, and here are the enemy, coming on at a run, and uproarious. The sudden apparition of our formidable line moving down upon them, so firm, so steady, in such awful silence, unmistakably staggered them. Their voices hushed; they came to a stand; they delivered a weak, spattering fire, which, though so close, did little harm. Then came our volley, and then a pause, for one tremendous moment, till the smoke should lift and show us the effect.

They are down—broken, crushed, fleeing all who can! British phlegm, British discipline could keep quiet no longer; out rang a cheer which none there, French or English, would forget while they lived. Every bugler in the regiment sounded the 'Advance'—kept sounding it over and over again. Forward over the wreck we stalked.

From that moment our advance, in spite of

momentary checks, was never stopped till we drew up at the finish—at La Belle Alliance—in the forefront of the whole British battle.

The horrors of our progress were not unmixed with ludicrous incidents. Here was the first piece of plunder I ever saw. One of the men, as he ran on, stooped, twitched a knapsack off a dead Frenchman's back, and throwing his firelock into the hollow of one arm, proceeded to rummage it with the other. Out flew letters, letters—nothing else. The more angrily he shook it, the more the papers fluttered. A nice prize—a knapsackful of *billets-doux*! The laugh was against him, and he flung it away with a curse.

We were now coming up to a second line, which seemed disposed to make a stand behind a little bank, on which, to all appearances, had grown yesterday a hedge—now levelled. As we came close the enemy's hearts failed them; they broke and fled. A few, who could not make up their minds in time, were bayoneted. Forward, forward, over man and horse and wreck of all sorts cumbering the ground! Since the time I spoke of things looking so ill a very short while had elapsed, but the change was as sudden and complete as a shifting scene in a pantomime. We were still leading, but the whole British army was coming on at our back. So forward were we that some of our own shells began to fall among us. A messenger was sent back to the offending artillery; but the commanding officer was indignant at the supposition that he was capable of making such bad practice. Suddenly we found ourselves on the brink of a deep hollow road, with steep clay-banks, very

slippery from the rain. It was choked with French, huddled together like sheep in a pen—French in dismay, crying for quarter. We slid down; our men snatched the French muskets, broke the stocks against the ground, flung away the barrels, left the disarmed crowd to be dealt with by our people in the rear—there were awkward stories of some of these defenceless men having been massacred by our allies—scrambled up the other bank, formed as good a fighting-line as ever, and forward, forward! There was a sudden cry of 'Cavalry!' a little uneasiness at being caught by them in line. But the word was passed, 'Remember you are four deep; it's as good as a square.' (We had been trained for any such sudden emergency. Any individual officer, in case of disorder, was to give the word, 'Form rallying square,' and collect in that form any stragglers near him; and I know of one case in which that was done.) But the men steadied in a moment. Out of the smoke rushed a mob of horsemen upon us. It was an English cavalry regiment, driven by and mixed up with a French one. Right on us they came. In self-defence we gave them our fire: it was deadly. French and English broke and vanished in the smoke as quickly as they had come into view. I heard of a British cavalry officer being killed in our ranks, unable to make the men understand that he was not a Frenchman. The disaster was no fault of ours.

Forward again. We were now getting near some French guns, which opened upon us, and down went a lot of men. A chattering in my ears, the like of which I had never heard, made me call out, 'What's

that?' An old sergeant, touching his cap, with a grim smile at the youngster's ignorance, replied, 'Grape, sir.' It was no small satisfaction to see the gunners cutting the traces of the teams and riding off. Every moment came fresh signs that the end was at hand. On the rising ground about Mont St Jean some of our batteries, which had been silent, broke out again fast and furious; and out came the sun, just as he had done on the previous evening. The sky was quite as wild and stormy. But how gloomy had he looked then—how bright and smiling now to me! And how to the unfortunate French? Then did I call to mind the saying of my brother-subaltern as to yesterday's sunset scene; and I asked myself, 'Well, is it beautiful now?' No. It was highly satisfactory—it was triumphant, glorious, &c., as much as you please—but beautiful it was not. In sober truth and plain English, a very ugly sight it was.

A bugler near me was taking a hearty pull at his canteen. 'Have you any to spare?' 'Yes, sir. It was water, and that was *the* drink of my life. I remember none so refreshing. I offered him money, which he would not hear of; and he was right—it was beyond price.

Our brave old quartermaster had just come up. I heard him behind me calling to the men, 'Now, my boys, I've brought you some rum; you'll have it directly.' This was even more welcome than the oil which he had produced as a morning whet.

We were still heading the pursuit. Resistance was over; but amid that scattered and terrified crowd might be seen four battalions marching off

the lost field in close and soldier-like array. All honour to such unshrinking gallantry; but as they were on the losing side, I take it that not much came their way.

We were now at La Belle Alliance, on the crest of the French position; daylight was fading; we halted. 'Let the men fall out!' and down they dropped, exhausted. Firing had ceased, except a few pops from some skirmishers of the 95th, who, determined to have the last word, had passed us and gone down the slope after the fleeing French. It must have been prudence bought by sore experience that, at such a moment, could make some of our old officers say, as I heard them say, gravely shaking their heads, 'Oh, this is not right! Don't you remember in the Peninsula, at —— and ——, how the beggars came back when we made sure they were done? They'll be upon us again in the dark; the men should be kept together, and ready.'

But there was no need; they never came back. The fight was over, and we were the victors.

A VETERAN'S GHOST-STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE ATTACK ON THE FARM,' &c.



IT was a fearful night, as dark as pitch, and outside in the forest it seemed as if the Storm Fiend had let loose all his myrmidons to play their own wild will with everything in their way. The storm that had threatened all the evening had come at last; and the thunder broke with a bellowing crash just above us, the blue blaze of the lightning showing up the tall, dark pines as they swayed and creaked, and more than one came crashing down. Then for a moment there came a lull, as though these demons were satisfied with the mischief they had done, and nought but the heavy downpour was heard; but it was only momentary, for on they came again with a rush and a swirl, the rain beating against the panes as if savage at being baffled in the attempt to break through them.

Hearing the storm without, as we sat in the snug parlour of 'The Little Black Squirrel,' and listening to the thunder as it rumbled away over the mountains, we drew our chairs closer to the blazing fire and thanked our stars we were under cover. It was not surprising on that dark autumnal night that our conversation should have turned on ghosts; for if ever there was a time that would suit them to be

abroad, it was then. So much so did we all feel this that no one seemed inclined to joke about them or attempt to deny their existence.

‘Well, I know one thing,’ said Pierre Deslin, the landlord; ‘I saw what I thought was a ghost once, and, *parbleu!* I don’t want that experience over again—though, as it turned out, it was not a ghost after all; but I should say that a real one must be the very deuce. *Ma foi!*’ he continued, with a grin and a sly twinkle in his eyes, ‘you fellows had better be careful when you go home to-night, and keep together, for I guess if there are any ghosts about, you will all run pretty quick.’

Now, old Deslin was as brave as a lion, and as modest as he was brave; and, what’s more, he had a kind heart. He was a veteran of the Grande Armée, and had retired with the rank of a *maréchal des logis-en-chef*. If his parents had only had the sense to have made him learn his letters better he would have had a commission, and Heaven knows what he would have been then!—something better, I warrant, than the landlord of a little mountain tavern in Alsace. Pierre, with his varied experiences and keen sense of humour, could tell a good story when he liked; and seeing that he was in the mood, we pricked up our ears, and for the time being forgot about the raging storm outside.

‘Never you mind about us,’ said Boussier the verderer; ‘let us hear about the ghost you saw, whether it was a real one or not.’

‘*Bon!* but fair-play is a jewel. One does not keep this place, my boy, for amusement,’ replied the old veteran, who was never above making a little money.

We understood, and accordingly ordered double *bocks* all round. Then, when we had made up the fire and recharged our pipes, the old soldier began :

‘It was on 4th December 1805, two days after the battle of Austerlitz, commonly known as the Battle of the Three Emperors, that I and my comrade Jean Breckner, troopers of the 2nd Chasseurs, received orders to act as escort to Captain Norderman, who, for conspicuous bravery as a lieutenant in Oudinot’s Grenadiers, had lately been made aide-de-camp to Prince Murat, from whom he had to carry despatches to General Drouvardel at Lasowitz, near Zwittau, on the Hungarian frontier.

‘Now, though I have got the battle of Austerlitz at my finger-ends, I am not going to tell you much about that ; but I must tell you a little, so that you may see why it was I was selected to go with the captain. And, besides, it does one good to think how the Russians and Austrians went head over heels into the trap the Emperor had set for them by inducing them to attack us on our right, between Tellnitz and Sokolnitz.

‘Half a squadron of us, fifty-eight sabres, had been detached from Murat’s brigade of light cavalry, composed of seven regiments on the left, to serve with Friant’s division under Legrand on the right, whose command had to bear the whole brunt of the Russian attack at the point I have mentioned. Of course we had to fall back ; but we kept our ground so tenaciously that, to oblige us to give way, the allies had to bring up men from their centre at Pratzen, and so weaken it ; which was just what the Emperor wanted, for that was such an impreg-

nable position that, if the fools had only stopped there, the Emperor would rather have retreated than have attempted to take it; but they, in their arrogance, little guessing his real aims, played into his hands.

‘The heights of Pratzen were taken, and by three o’clock the battle was actually over. It is admitted now that our great chief made one mistake in allowing fifteen thousand Russians to escape by the Monetz defile, for we had to fight these men over again three years later at Eylau and Friedland. It is noteworthy that at Austerlitz Napoleon employed little more than half his men, and consequently there were many who were quite fresh, and some of these might well have annihilated that fifteen thousand, had they followed them up.

‘It will be remembered how the Emperor, with marvellous forethought—diabolical cleverness, his enemies called it—had, towards the close of the battle, as the Russians were retreating over the frozen lakes, ordered the artillery not to fire at the men, but into the ice in front of them. Many of the Russians, in their frantic fear, rushed on; but the bulk of the poor wretches, seeing the fate that awaited them, turned back, only to be shot down by our men on the banks. Some few did reach the land; but these were quickly bayoneted into the icy water again.

‘We Chasseurs were spread out behind our men on the banks, in case some might by chance escape those who were awaiting them; so we were silent witnesses of this butchery. I was on the extreme right of the line. Our lieutenant had been wounded

that morning, and we at that point were under a *maréchal des logis*—a regular brute he was, too—named Coussin. It happened that one of the returning fugitives reserved his fire till he was close to the bank, when he shot one of our men and clubbed another; and though he received a wound himself on the head, he got through the cordon and darted off for dear life. I can see the poor wretch now with the blood running down his face. Observing this, the *maréchal des logis* ordered me to follow him and cut him down. It was a sickening duty, for I thought the poor hunted fellow deserved his freedom.

‘It was easy for Coussin to give orders; but there were a lot of willow-stumps just there, and I did not want to lame my horse, and, honestly, it was no easy work to follow him. I could, if I had wished to bring down the quarry, have dismounted and taken a steady shot at him with my carbine; but, as I really wanted him to escape, I let him run across this frozen swamp, and soon he got on the ice, and reached an island with some thick willows on it. There he was perfectly safe. It would have been useless to follow him. However, to keep up appearances, I fired in that direction. Coussin, who had been watching me, was perfectly furious when I came back, for this man was the only one who escaped, though at other parts of the lake some commanding officers allowed the Russians to give themselves up as prisoners. “I will pay you out for that, *mon enfant*,” he said, with an oath; “you see if I don’t.”

‘So I was not surprised that when it came to

choosing the two who should go on the somewhat dangerous duty of escorting Captain Norderman, he selected me for one. However, I did not mind; I was glad to get away from him for a little. He was always finding fault with some one, and his wrath would probably be turned on somebody else by the time I returned. A few days before I had been present at Brunn when so many Russian wounded were burnt to death in the hospital; but their cries did not dwell in my memory as did the heart-rending shrieks of those poor unfortunates on the lake as they were forced into their watery graves. That was another reason why I was not really sorry to leave the locality for a little.

‘Just as we started on our mission we met the Emperor surrounded by his *état major*, among whom I recognised Murat, Junot, Soult, Bernadotte, Duroc, Bessières, Suchet, and many others. The only general of importance who was missing was Lannes, who had gone off in a huff to Paris because he considered—and rightly too, for no one had done more to bring about the victory—that his services had not been sufficiently recognised in the official bulletin. Napoleon was at that very moment on his way from the Château of Nasiedlowitz to take part in the memorable and historical meeting with the Emperor of Austria at the Mill of Poleny.

‘It was a sharp, crisp morning, and the sun shone brightly, but not with sufficient force to melt the snow that glistened and sparkled on the trees.

‘I noticed at once that, splendid soldier as he was, Captain Norderman, like many infantry officers, had not a good seat on horseback, though

I do not think I should have paid much attention to that had it not been for what happened afterwards. We had gone some distance through an interminable pine-forest, when we pulled up at an inn to give our horses a rest. Not very long after we started, as we were going down a steep incline, the captain's horse stumbled on the slippery, frozen ground, and fell heavily with its rider. I feared at first, as he lay motionless and as white as the snow around him, that he had broken his neck; but he regained his senses after I had given him some spirit from his flask. His right arm was broken and his head cut so badly that it was useless for him to attempt to continue his journey.

'Jean Breckner was really my senior; but he was a dull, heavy fellow, and I suppose the captain saw that. "Look here!" he said to me. "Take my sabre-tache. These despatches are important, so hurry on with them; and if everything goes right, it will be a good thing for you."

'I may state here that the captain was as good as his word, for on my return, through his influence, I was made a brigadier: and once I got my foot on the first rung of the ladder, my promotion from that time was as rapid as I had any right to expect.

'Though I was sorry for the captain's mishap, I was naturally elated at the chance of gaining a little distinction, and after I had helped my comrade to lift the wounded officer into his saddle, I started to perform my duty as fast as the dangerous state of the ground would permit.

'I was filled with a strange and glorious sense of freedom. For the first time since I had joined the

service I felt I was my own master. I had taken part in many foraging expeditions, when we had driven off cattle and taken everything that came in our way; but then I had always been under a *sous-officier* or *maréchal des logis*; now I was a free agent, and I could ride fast or slow, just as the fancy took me. But at the same time I was fully aware of the responsibilities and dangers of my position. We French, as conquering invaders, were naturally hated with a deadly hatred by the Austrian peasantry. Many a small escort, as I knew well enough, to say nothing of a solitary *estafette*, had been killed in cold blood; but I was young and reckless, and the dangers around me only gave a zest to my duty.

‘My route was north-west, and I rode with the sun on my left. As I proceeded the sky gradually became more and more overcast, and a keen wind from the north sprang up. It was getting on towards four o’clock, and the winter day was coming to a close, when I came to a little inn, called “The Three Magpies,” on the verge of the forest. Before me I saw nothing but a vast bleak plain, with here and there a stunted tree upon it. I did not like the prospect, for the clouds were getting blacker than ever; so I resolved to give my horse rest and get some refreshment myself ere I crossed the desolate waste in front.

‘The landlord—a rough, uncouth fellow, with a huge black beard and small, cunning eyes—told me that, apart from some rye-spirit, he had nothing to offer me; adding, with a sneer, that that was too good for a —— Frenchman. It so happened that as he spoke I heard a cock crow. Nettled by his

manner, without saying a word I took my steed round to the stable, where I found several chickens. I had caught and wrung the necks of two, when the man altered his tone and told me that perhaps he could find some goat's-flesh.

'A soldier *en campagne* never knows when he may get his next meal, so I made a very good one, and what I could not eat I put into my haversack. I also took some of the rye-spirit, and uncommonly strong it was, too. I wished afterwards I had left it alone. The landlord, however, drank this raw, fiery stuff as though it were water; and, apart from making him more talkative, it did not seem to affect him at all. "I don't envy you your ride," he said when I had finished. "You see, it will snow soon. Where are you going?"

"To Lasowitz, the headquarters of General Drouvardel," I replied.

"That's three good leagues," he said. Then he gave me some directions, as there was a mere track across the plain. "You see that solitary pine? Well, you keep that to the left. When you get level with it you will see a clump of firs on the horizon; you must go to the right of that. From that point you will see a forest right in front of you, and by skirting to the right of it you will come upon the road."

'I thanked him for his information, and went to fetch the horse. I was engaged in tightening the girths, when he told me I owed him two thalers.

'Never since I crossed the frontier had I paid for anything, and I was quite astonished at being asked to do so. As a matter of fact, I had no

money; and I told him he could go to the deuce, and that he ought to be grateful that I had not put a bullet in him for telling me lies and saying he had no food in the place.

‘We should probably have come to blows, when at that moment the fellow’s young wife arrived. She had just come from market, and had a basket on her arm. Young and impressionable, I was perfectly astounded by her extraordinary beauty. From her splendid figure and flashing yet languorous dark eyes, I felt sure she was of Hungarian origin. The Austrian women are pretty, *très gentille, très chic*; but they have not the irresistible, passionate fire of the Hungarians. Moreover, there was a suspicion of *diablerie* in her manner, and that added to her beauty. I had mounted my horse and was about to start. “Come, my brave lad,” she said coaxingly, placing her hand on my knee and looking up into my eyes, “surely you will pay for what you have had. We are very poor; the war has nearly ruined us. I have been to market, and I have not been able to sell anything.” She spoke, to my surprise, in very good French.

‘Every one has a weak point—mine in those days was a pretty face. I had never seen her equal before. *Ma foi!* the heavens were in her eyes, and her lips were the gates of paradise. It was a case of the old fable of the Sun and the Wind. Her brute of a husband would never have got a *silber-groschen* out of me; but with her I was as clay in the hands of the potter. Doubtless she saw her advantage. “Come,” she continued in French, “and have a glass before you go.” “And what about a kiss, my

beauty?" I said in a low tone and in the same language. "Well, we shall see about that," she laughed, with a toss of her head. "Come in."

'Forgetting all about the despatches—in fact, everything—I led my horse into the stable again, and, like a young fool, followed her into the tavern as innocently as a lamb skips into the butcher's yard. I liked the idea of the adventure. I felt sure there was some mystery connected with the girl. I could not imagine one so lovely being married to such a clown. From her voice and manner, she had evidently been well educated, and I wanted to solve this enigma. I had expected the landlord to follow us; but for a while he remained outside. "*Parbleu!* I am going to have the kiss now," I said, placing my hand on her shoulder. "No, no," she said, with a sharp movement, and the blood mounted up through her warm olive skin. "You sit there."

'So I took a seat at the table, and she sat opposite and poured me out a glass of the ardent spirit; then, clinking our glasses, she drank to my health and I drank to hers. Her husband at this point came into the room. "Listen, *mon brave*," she said, leaning across the table; "you really must give us something. You soldiers have always plenty of money. Give us a trifle, just for luck, you know."

'It had chanced that at cards on the previous night I had won from a comrade a piece of coral, mounted in gold, and a few precious stones he had taken from a shrine. "I cannot give you money," I answered. "I have not got any myself; but I have got some things here," I continued, foolishly producing the little bag which contained the jewels. "There,



I sprang back and covered him with my cocked pistol.

ma chérie," I said, "you can wear that on Sundays;" and I presented her with the piece of coral. Her face beamed with delight; and, seeing a guitar in the corner, and quite carried away by her beauty, I was going to ask her to sing me something, when I was struck by the effect which the sight of the stones had on the ruffian standing beside her. As soon as he saw them his eyes were filled with a dangerous, fiendish look of greed and curiosity; so much so that I hastily put them away.

'There hung on the wall opposite a large hunting-knife. I had noticed it before. I saw the man, in an absent-minded sort of way, go and take the knife down, and in an equally leisurely manner walk round the room with it, taking up a position behind me. I saw this, I say, but still I suspected no danger. At that moment the woman made a hurried, involuntary movement, and her face turned deadly pale. Our eyes met only for one moment; but it was enough, for I read her meaning, and sprang up just as the innkeeper had raised his arm to stab me in the neck. "You cursed scoundrel!" I cried as I sprang back and covered him with my cocked pistol. "Hands up, I say, or you are a dead man!" I had got the table between us, and had him completely at my mercy. At least he thought so; but, to tell the truth, my pistol (a beautiful silver-mounted one I picked up on the battlefield) was not even loaded. With an oath he dropped the murderous weapon. I compelled him to go out in front of me to the stable, where I mounted my mare and rode off as fast as I could.

'I had not gone a hundred metres when a bullet

whizzed past my ear; and pulling up my horse, I saw the cowardly ruffian with the gun still smoking in his hands. My first resolution was to dash back and chastise him; but I soon saw the utter uselessness of doing that, as he was already reloading his weapon; and from the interior of his dwelling he could easily get another safe shot at me. So I resumed my journey with the determination of paying him a little visit when I returned.

‘I was convinced from her manner that the landlord’s wife had no evil intention when she induced me to enter the inn. I quite acquitted her of all blame; in fact, but for her warning glance my fate must have been sealed. Perhaps, however, her beauty had something to do with this lenient view.

‘I was so preoccupied with the thoughts of my providential escape, and the vengeance I meant to take on the first opportunity, that I did not at first notice the increasing darkness, nor even that snow had begun to fall. Had my mare only known the road, neither the darkness nor the snow would have troubled me so much, for horses have a wonderful instinct for finding their way; but, as I still had to go three leagues, I began to get uneasy and look anxiously for the landmarks the man had given me.

‘I had passed the solitary tree he had spoken of; but, alas! I could not distinguish in the gloom the clump of firs. There was nothing but a great, bleak, undulating plain in front of me as far as the eye could see. Faster and faster fell the snow, and as it reached the ground the strong north wind blew it as frozen powder in blinding gusts in my face, freezing me to the very bones as I bent down almost to my

horse's crupper before the icy blast. I soon felt convinced that my horse had got off the track, as she stumbled through the ice of some of those salt-marshes which abound in that district. My hands and feet were becoming numbed. I could hardly hold the reins, and I had not the least idea where I was going. I began to fear that I had made my last campaign, and that it was useless to struggle on, when through the snow I saw a small hut about a hundred paces from me. Thanking Providence for my good fortune, I urged my tired horse towards it.

'At all costs I determined to pass the night there; but remembering my late experience, I stopped and loaded my pistol ere I approached the dwelling. My precautions, however, were needless, as I found the place was empty. The unfortunate inhabitants had evidently only recently fled, for the remains of a fire were still warm. The little hovel was divided into two parts, the family using one, while the other was evidently a stable. My first care was to see to my mare; and after I had brushed and groomed her, I gave her a good feed of oats that I had brought from the inn. Then, with a light heart, I made up the fire. As I had not sufficient wood, I was breaking up the manger, when, as good luck would have it, I found therein a child's cap and cape and a small sack of carrots and potatoes, which the peasants must have overlooked in their hurried flight. The carrots I kept for my mare, while I placed the potatoes round the fire, on which my soup was soon simmering in my *marmite*.

'The storm outside still raged with unabated fury, shaking the little cabin to its foundations; but little

I cared for that, for I was warm and snug before a blazing fire, and I listened with complacency, almost with a secret pleasure, to the wind as it blustered and howled down the chimney; and no king in his palace was happier than I.

‘Then, when my meal was over—and I had made a good one, too, for, apart from the goat’s-flesh, I had brought away the two chickens—I lighted my pipe, and by the flickering flames began to spell over with some difficulty—for I never was a scholar—the only letter I had ever received from my *fiancée*, Charlotte Frezbach, who was far away in Alsace, and who, I had no doubt, was also thinking of me. Naturally I could not help comparing her with the lovely Hungarian I had seen at the inn. Now that I was no longer under the immediate influence of the latter’s dark, flashing eyes and the effect of the ardent spirit I had imbibed had died away, I might perhaps admit that she was really the more beautiful of the two; still, I felt that, after all, Charlotte, with her true heart and simple nature, would make the better wife. Then my thoughts quickly turned to the jewels I possessed, for was it not with these that I expected to do so much when I returned? With loving care I opened the little bag and gloated over the gems as they sparkled in the firelight. What a price would they not fetch!

‘I grew quite sentimental. I thought of how I would go back to my native village covered with honour and glory and riches, and of our happy married life. I thought of how my dear one would amuse herself looking after our pretty cottage, our children, and the cows and chickens; while I, as a

veteran, would fight my battles over again, and sit and drink and smoke all day and half the night down at "The Garland of Flowers."

'Oh, *parbleu*! men try and look into the future; but it's a good thing they cannot do so. Jewels and women are not always what they appear. Within a month I was destined to find, when I tried to sell them, that the stones were only paste; and when I returned to my home three years later, Charlotte had been married long ago. But I did not know that then; so, with these happy thoughts in my head, after I had made the fire up and looked at the mare I wrapped myself up in my long cloak, and with my saddle as a pillow, I soon fell into a heavenly slumber.

'I must have slept some hours, when I was suddenly awakened by a sharp, shrill, almost human cry from my mare—a cry I had sometimes heard horses make on the battlefield when the poor brutes were wounded. But for a mass of red ashes on the hearth, all was dark. I was about to rise, when, suddenly looking up, what should I see—and the sight froze the very marrow in my bones—but a white face with a pair of enormous gleaming red eyes watching me intently through the bottle-end glass windows! No creature made of flesh and blood could have such eyes. For the moment, often as I had faced death, I was speechless with fright, and the perspiration broke out on my forehead. Till then I had never believed in ghosts, and had laughed at those who did. The mare also added to my agitation by her frenzied efforts to get loose, for she was kicking and plunging with fear to such

an extent that I wonder she did not bring the whole place down.

‘Luckily, at that moment my nerveless hand fell on the cocked pistol beside me. The feel of the familiar weapon brought me back in a measure from the supernatural; and, whether it would affect the supposed spirit or not, I raised it mechanically and fired. The face disappeared, and with its disappearance my courage returned. Springing up, I saw by the light of the moon, which had just come out from behind a cloud, that the ghost was nothing but an old gray wolf that was limping off, leaving a trail of blood behind it on the snow. The brute, however, soon stopped; and after vainly trying to lick the wound, it sank down dead, for my bullet had passed through its neck. My mare was still trembling with fright, and I could only quiet her by bringing her in to the fire, which I quickly made up again.

‘Though my courage, I say, had quite returned now that I knew my visitor was of flesh and blood, and that the terrible aspect of the great red eyes that had so much alarmed me was only caused by the reflection of the fire through the magnifying power of the little, round, bottle-end panes of the window, still the knowledge that there were wolves in the vicinity was discomfiting. We had wolves in Alsace, and I knew that a wolf that has become gray and toothless, like the one I had just seen, is generally driven from the pack, but he keeps near on the chance of getting anything they may leave. I knew, moreover, that, the animals having such keen sight and smell, the carcass outside might attract

them, and before morning I might find the little hovel surrounded by wolves.

‘No wonder, then, as I sat down and counted my bullets and looked to my powder, I wished it had never fallen to my lot to carry the captain’s despatches. I wished the *maréchal des logis* at the deuce for having chosen me to act as escort. I even thought bitterly of the landlord’s wife; for if she had not enticed me to follow her into the tavern I might have got across the plain before the snow came on. In fact, I blamed everybody except myself, as we usually do when we make a *faux pas*. However, it was no good worrying about it. I had been in many a dilemma before, and got out all right; so, after throwing on some more logs, lulled by the flicker of the flames, I soon went off to sleep again.

‘The next morning before starting I went out and made a good survey of the surrounding country. The snow had quite ceased, and the red sun was slowly rising through the mist in the east. I was much surprised and delighted to see the clump of fir-trees the innkeeper had spoken of some distance to the rear; and, making all allowance for the blinding storm, I wondered how I could have missed it. What was more, I also saw the forest away to the north on the horizon. Not a wolf was in sight except the dead one lying in the snow; and, little guessing what was in store for me, I almost laughed at my fears of the previous night. My natural spirits had returned, and I mounted my horse and trotted gaily over the snow towards the forest, where I knew I ought to find the road. I reckoned I had

not much more than a league to go, and I ought soon to be at the General's headquarters.

'I must have been a thousand metres from the forest when I suddenly saw a squadron of cavalry marching in double file towards the rising sun, at right angles to me. Why, if they were French, they should be going due east, and why they should keep so closely under the shadows of the trees, I could not make out. Besides, if I could see them, they must have seen me, a solitary horseman on the plain; yet they made no sign. They were hardly likely to be Russians, and they were certainly not "white-coats," as the Austrians were called; but I could not be too careful, for some of their uniforms were uncommonly like ours.

'Seeing a hollow near, I hastily rode in that direction, resolving when I reached it to watch them more closely. As soon as I got to the hollow I dismounted, and lightly holding my horse's rein, I crawled up on hands and knees to observe them. The sun shone brightly on their scabbards and accoutrements, and my fears were soon at rest, for there was no doubt that they were French Hussars. Being convinced of that, I was just going to get up and mount again, and ride forward towards them, when suddenly my mare jerked the reins out of my hand, and with cocked ears stood still for a moment. I tried to catch her; but ere I could do so a sound came over the plain which sent my heart into my mouth, and with a snort of fear, she, free from all burden, flew *ventre à terre*, with the stirrups flapping against her sides, over the snow-clad plain, straight for the men I had been watching.

'Then--oh, great heavens!--my heart sank within me, for I had heard that sound before; I knew at once it was the baying of a pack of wolves. I took one look. They were still a good distance off; but I knew I had no chance unless the soldiers in front saw and realised my plight, and that right quickly. Just as I had at first wished to be unobserved, now I prayed to Providence that I might be seen. My carbine was on my saddle; I had but my pistol and sword. If the worst came to the worst, I determined at last to turn and face my foes; but still, life at that age is very dear, and I ran and ran as I had never run before.

'To give myself a better chance, I threw off my long cloak. But nearer and nearer came the deep, loud baying. Impeded as I was by my great boots, it was impossible for me to make great progress, and I felt I was fast sinking. All my past life seemed to flash upon me in those terrible moments. But my prayer was answered. My riderless horse had been seen. I heard the trumpet in the distance sound "the trot" and then "the gallop." It was a race for life. It all depended on whether my rescuers or the wolves would reach me first. The mere knowledge that help was coming, though I feared it might be too late, to a certain extent drove away my utter despair. On and on I struggled, but getting weaker every moment. I dared not look round; but something after a little while told me that my crafty pursuers were relaxing their efforts, for the yelping and baying, though continuous, did not appear to be getting any louder. On the other hand, I saw the Hussars racing towards me. Nearer and nearer they

came, and soon a clear, sharp voice rang out across the snow: "*Courage, mon enfant! Courage!*"

'In another moment, just as I fell exhausted on the snow, with a swoop my brave deliverers, jingling and jangling, their horses straining forward on their bits, and their drawn swords glittering in the sun, dashed past me, with a cheer, straight at my pursuing foes, and I knew I was saved! The wolves, in fact, never waited for their onslaught; but I heard the crackle of some carbines, and I learned afterwards a few were hit.

'My heart went out in gratitude to these brave fellows; but it was some time ere I could get my breath to thank them. When I had done so they crowded round me, asking me whether it was true that the Emperor had gained a great battle, for rumours had reached them of a victory; but they had seen no one who could give reliable particulars. Loud and long were the cheers that arose when I gave them particulars of the battle of Austerlitz, and for some time I was eagerly questioned by the officer in command and by his excited troopers.

"Well, my lad," said the captain after I had finished my narrative, "you have had a narrow escape, and I am glad we were able to help you; but it seems to me that, if you belong to Murat's brigade, we must have been on the wrong road." "Of course you were, *mon capitaine*," I replied. "You were going due east, and you ought to be going south-east." Then I gave him full particulars of his route; nor did I forget to tell him of "The Three Magpies" and the treatment I had received from the landlord.

‘He was an uncommonly handsome young fellow this captain, with a reckless, dare-devil look about him. “You say,” he exclaimed, with a twinkle in his eye, as he twisted his moustache, “that we shall find plenty to eat and drink, and a pretty woman into the bargain. *Parbleu!* then it is time we were off.” Thereupon, turning to a brigadier, he ordered him and a trooper to act as my guides, and soon we were trotting in opposite directions over the plain.

‘That young officer, whose name was Raymondière, and whom I was destined to know well in years to come, had very much taken my fancy, apart from the great debt I owed him for saving my life. He was evidently very popular with his men, and many a story the troopers told me of him as we cantered along. If half the stories these fellows related to me were true—well, I felt sorry for the innkeeper, villain as he was.

‘On delivering the despatches, I was ordered to return at once with the two men who had come with me. On my way back, when I reached the single pine-tree, I naturally expected to see the inn; but there was no appearance of it, and I almost feared I had mistaken the track. Then as we got nearer we saw that it had been burnt to the ground, and only the blackened walls remained. I was very vexed, for I was anxious to see *la belle Hongroise* again. The more I thought of that beautiful girl the more mystified I became; but the desire to see her did not prevent me from resolving to settle accounts with her husband. To quiet my conscience—and it is very easy to find a way to do that when

we want to—I persuaded myself that that ruffian had got the girl into his power by some unfair means; but I was soon to find out that others had paid off this score for me. I had just got up to the building, which was still smouldering, when my mare suddenly swerved aside and came to a sudden halt. Trembling all over, she planted her feet before her, and the breath came sharply through her distended nostrils. Wondering at the cause, I looked up, and saw among the trees quite close to me the body of the innkeeper swaying in the wind. His repulsive face, with its great black beard, looked more repulsive than ever. On his shoulder a carrion crow was perched. One eye had already been pecked out, and the bird was busy pecking at the other.

‘A horrible feeling, half-fear, half-disgust, fell on all three of us. “*Allons!*” said the brigadier, with a ghastly look on his face—“*allons!*” and he and his comrades went off as though the Evil One were behind them. Digging the spurs into the mare and giving her her head, I forced her past the body and raced after them.

‘I had certainly not been sorry the day before to leave the scene of our great victory; but I know I was precious glad when I pulled up my jaded steed once more at Prince Murat’s headquarters.’

THE TOREADOR'S TALISMAN.

BY CHARLES EDWARDES.



THE idea of taking a man's property from him by force has always seemed to me more objectionable than the idea of killing that same man in honest stand-up fight. Maybe it's a twist in the Buckingham nature to hold just that view of things. Maybe, again, it's a virtue that has never yet been properly appreciated by the world of stay-at-home tailors and tinkers. And, faith! if so, it's one I share with good men, including His Grace the Duke of Wellington himself, who could not tolerate the low tricks of pocket-picking which at times got the upper hand even of his army and the stern halter-discipline with which he tried to teach them better.

'Tis my Lord Duke again who reminds me of this same useful lesson. As I said, no man liked better to have a good fixed salary and to stick to it. Yet when they voted him five thousand pounds for his share of Indian loot and what not (Seringapatam and half-a-dozen other cities), he accepted it, without grumbling indeed. And he paid his debts with it, too—which is another lesson to the ruck of us; no idle treats and picnics and things with it, but just handed it over to them that had the first claim on it.

He was a ten-man-in-one for you, if you like, or if you don't like either.

This plain snip of a sermon brings me to my story of the poor toreador's talisman and the events of a certain week in A.D. 1811, which might have enabled me to give my boy Daniel a university education and my little girl Molly a new frock every week for her lifetime, but which, in cold simple fact, didn't do any such thing at all, at all. And that's the luck of it, though it's not I, Bill Buckingham, that's complaining. 'Twould be no use if I were, moreover; and that maybe is why I'm holding my tongue about it so entirely.

I had been across the frontier from Portugal into Spain, Salamanca way, on special service, and was returning all flea-bitten from toe to scalp, when I found myself, one September evening, mighty near to the city of Guarda on its hill. I had worked it from Sabugal, with just my man Dermot Lake to keep me company, and we were both glad of an excuse to call a halt. That same excuse was the music from a granite cottage among the gorse-blossom a few paces to the left of the road: a guitar touched by the fingers of a genius!

'Tis no Portuguese, your honour, handling the gut like that!' said Dermot when we had both held our steeds, spell-bound, for a moment or two. They were leg-weary, poor beasts! and quite ready to pretend to an interest of that kind in the fine arts.

'No Spaniard neither!' said I. 'He'd be mad else. 'Tis just one of the heavenly choir dropped from the minstrel gallery in the sky. And I'm going to have a look at him.'

That was soon managed.

The cottage had the usual trim whitish inside, but with patches of green damp on it due to the moisture of the past winter (for Guarda stands terribly high towards the clouds, when they're about); and there were just strings of onions and frying-pans and things on the walls, and nothing tempting for a wicked soldier to seize at sight. They had learnt that wisdom in both countries by then; and, rich or pauper-poor, they'd swear by a variety of local saints that they hadn't the wherewithal for a meal for themselves this time to-morrow. No wonder either! What kind of fibs our good folks at home would be after telling if the French overran Yorkshire, Lancashire, and my dear old Tipperary herself, and asked about the contents of the cupboards as they did in Spain and Portugal, indeed and I've not imagination enough for guessing. But they'd be better fibs than any ignorant Portuguese could think of, I warrant.

I just stepped inside, and Dermot after me, without any ceremony, leaving the horses blowing at the door. Ceremony was just wasted on these Southern gentry: they beat you at the game before you could make a beginning, and so I for one had settled to do without it. 'Twas no bad notion. I'm not thinking an archangel would trouble to knock at the door of a poor Irish peasant when he and the pig found themselves together at the threshold, impatient to enter. Faith, no! he'd treat the poor people at home as if he were just one of themselves, like the pig. And that's what hard-working folks enjoy, whether it's steadily concerned they've been all day

picking stones from the fields or tiring themselves out just sitting in the sun and wagering where they'll feel their next flea-bite.

There was an old man at the fire stooping over a pot, a handsome middle-aged man with the guitar in the heart of the room, and as pretty a boy by him in clouts as ever I saw. These were what the cottage had to show us when I gave them my '*Buenas!*' And then they all three did me reverence.

I was used to that compliment when I took the pains to stand my full height and square my shoulders. 'Tis not a few more inches round the stomach than need be that make the difference when the soldier-spirit in a man beams forth daringly in his eyes. And, moreover, I'd loosened my cloak, so that the red jacket and gold lace on me peeped at them like the dazzle of sunshine through the trees of a leafy lane. There was also the ivory-and-gold handle of that pretty little pistol I'd won at Busaco after pinking its late owner through the body; and my Sheffield blade showed its handle, ever ready for business, like Tipperary Buckingham himself.

Nor had Dermot Lake an indifferent cargo of abilities about him to support my own, so that in this year of grace 1811 we were likely in such a cottage to be welcomed respectfully.

'Don't let us disturb your solo, I said affably, seating myself. 'That was the attraction, *amigo*—that and the pleasure of getting ten minutes' relief from those cursed saddles of Salamanca.' Having said this, I observed that the old man with the pot was a marvellously wrinkled person. I doubt if an

artificer of wrinkles could have done more with his countenance than nature had done uninvited. He had mean little eyes and a palsy, and who knows what other accomplishments?

When I spoke he cringed humbly; but I marked those little pig's eyes of his settle towards my waist-belt.

'Your illustrious lordship is English?' asked the Spaniard, with an eager smile that I liked.

I bade Dermot hold his tongue: the rascal had said out loud, 'Just look at his hair, sir!'

'English or Irish,' I replied, 'it is all one as touching your own illustrious lordship's interests. No offence meant.'

Then his hands, both of them, sprang out in greeting, and at the same time he cried to the boy, 'Salute, little one, the other honourable *caballero*!' And there we were, Dermot and I, each paired off at pump-handle work.

'It has very little fingers, that one, sir,' said my man afterwards. 'And did you ever see such a pair of bright eyes on a face?'

But the Spaniard was anxious to communicate some intelligence to me. He beckoned me aside.

'Mind him, sir!' murmured that forward idiot of mine.

'Get some coffee and tie up your tongue,' said I; and he set to work to obey me, shifting the Portuguese unceremoniously. The old fellow uttered an obsequious word or two, and then, taking a bowl of lettuce-leaves, left the room and began to call his fowls together outside.

'Señor,' said my Spaniard earnestly, 'do you know

that there is a squadron of French dragoons in Guarda ?'

Begad ! I did not. I thought the allies were the stronger party in that town just then, and that Marmont had decided to carry his tail 'twixt his legs for a spell.

'Yes,' proceeded the man ; 'and it is the colonel of the company that I am seeking. I am seeking him with this ! Do you understand me, *caballero* ?'

Faith ! I did. He was a changed man for one red instant as he snapped forth the stiletto from his guitar's handle, and, clenching his teeth, held the blade as if for active service. Like so many in those days, he had chalked up a score which only bloody vengeance could pay.

'I shall tell you, señor,' he went on in a whisper, having boxed his dagger. He looked at his boy as if he didn't want him to be listening. The lad was close to Dermot, watching him at the pot. 'Have you heard of Rusendo the toreador ?'

'Rusendo the Invincible ?' I inquired.

'Yes, I am that, I suppose,' he said, with a shrug. 'At least I have never been pricked by a bull. I am rich. The world smiles at me, though it brings so much misery to others—and to me too, at last. He—Colonel Tarquin Vasche, as the cursed villain is called—he has killed my wife, my Dolores. It was fifteen days ago. He quartered himself at my *quinta* by Bejar, and—well, you, who are a soldier, understand. It will be his turn presently.'

'I am not that kind of soldier, my friend,' said I. 'But I understand.'

He looked at me with lowering, fixed brows, then again took my hand.

‘Are you a Catholic?’ he asked.

‘The Tipperary Buckinghams have never been anything else,’ I replied. ‘Let me introduce myself, Señor Rusendo, as Captain William Lees Buckingham.’

‘It is enough,’ said he quickly, with one more fierce squeeze of my fingers. ‘Señor Capitano, I dreamed last night that I was carried off to heaven by an eagle. That is a bad dream, and I wish to be prepared. You sleep here?’

I decided that I might do worse—if the larder permitted.

‘Good,’ said he. He touched the curious little bob into which his hair at the back had been packed. ‘There is that here,’ he said, ‘which would in case of need help you to protect my little daughter if misfortune should come upon me. It was given to me by the Sultan of Morocco after an engagement at Tangiers. “If you are ever taken as a slave,” said he—“which Allah forbid!—this little bull will be good ransom even for you, Don Juan.” In the meantime, it may prove a talisman. My daughter is all I have now to live for, and’——

He stopped and glanced towards the boy, who was half-sitting on Dermot’s knee, leaning against it with the grace of an old Greek statue.

‘Daughter?’ said I.

‘Yes,’ he whispered, much moved. ‘My Juanita! She is safer thus. May she continue so! I could not leave her, though it is cowardly in me to let her face the risks which’——

He did not finish. I had heard something, and was on my feet with a call to Dermot. Down dropped the coffee-pot, and the little Spanish boy who was a girl cried 'Oh!' as some of the hot stuff splashed him.

'By the powers, sir, we're surrounded!' cried my man after a glance through the window. 'There's a score of Frenchies, and they've got the horses.'

I turned to the Spaniard, and asked him quickly what he would do. For myself, my pistol was out and my sword ready; and Dermot was just as prepared.

Dermot fired through the window.

'I've settled *him*, anyway,' he said contentedly. 'Twas the old rascal here, sir. He's done Judas Iscariot on us. Ay, you may well claw up the dirt of your own garden, you mean crather!'

The clatter outside continued. I slipped to the door and shot its heavy wooden bolt. That should mean five minutes for us, methought.

'Save her!' said Rusendo to me now in a hoarse whisper. The little maid was clinging to his arm.

But there could hardly have been a more hopeless kind of request. Hiding-place there seemed none in this box of a room, with its two shallow cupboards that could not have hidden a cat. True, there was a black, old chimney; but it was too obvious a resource, and the poor child's 'No! no!' of objection when Dermot pointed to it was as natural as could be.

Only one chance showed itself to me. Over our heads was a shelf for bacon slung close to the rafters.

'Cover that window. Be smart!' I cried to my man.

It was done; and then, standing on a chair, I explained my idea to the Spaniard. There was a hubbub now at the door and a summons to surrender. Rusendo took his daughter in his arms and lifted her up to me.

'Wait, father dear,' said the poor child when I was about to do my part. From the chair, she put her arms round his neck and hid her face on his cheek, with little sobs. It was a touching sight, though I had seen too many such since Rolica's day to lose my head over it.

She yielded to persuasion, and in another second or two I had the pretty little saint nicely sandwiched, her body actually squeezed against the grimy woodwork of the rafters.

'Now then, *amigo*,' I said to Rusendo, 'if you act prudently there ought to be no danger for either of you. Keep that dagger out of sight, man!'

He had drawn it and put on an expression to match.

'Door won't stand much, sir,' said my man.

Faith! then, it was time to deliver my plan of campaign; and Dermot stretched his ears to miss no word I spoke. He had amazing great ears. In the Puritan times of old there's many a humorous judge that would have felt *bound* to sentence them to be nailed to the pillory once he set eyes on them, with their broad flapping uppers that seemed meant for just that sort of discipline. But indeed 'twas no season to remember such mirthful trifles just then.

'We've no chance at all, sir,' said he when I had finished.

I thought differently. One peep through the

window had satisfied me as to that. The Frenchmen were treating us to too many preliminaries. We might have been a walled city instead of a Portuguese hovel. Their officer was disposing his men this way and that, now making them lift their guns to their shoulders, and now changing his mind and setting them to stand with fixed bayonets as if to receive cavalry. And behind them were our two horses with pricked ears, and when I whistled the Cid he gave me a little signal which told me he was fresh again and on the alert.

‘With luck,’ I said, ‘we might both pull it off. That old shrine a mile down the road will do for the rendezvous if we get parted. I’ll wait for you there till midnight, and you do the same for me. The survivor will hurry on to camp after midnight alone. And don’t forget your lesson, Dermot Lake, if you are the only one of us that gets safe to the General.’

We were both ready, with swords out.

‘Señor!’ cried the Spaniard, joining his hands in entreaty.

I’ll do him the honour to believe it was only his daughter he felt fright about. But ’twas no matter for that. I had my duty to the king to fulfil, and, faith! that was more to me and the country than his private vindictiveness; though it’s a harsh thing to call it by such a name when one remembers it was his own wife he was so eager to avenge.

‘Señor,’ cried I, ‘God guard you!’

And then I nodded to Dermot, who softly moved back the bolt of the door. The instant it was free I kicked out the door itself and charged, bull-fashion, at the partridge legs in front to the right.



I shot the owner of that bayonet in the neck, and then went off
with a loose rein down the hill.

And Dermot did his share too. There was a rattle of blasphemies, and twice Dermot's pistol cracked out. As for me, I gave two men the edge of my sword and one the point, and then I was alongside and on my Cid. And I tarried for no more. One stab of a bayonet got home through the muscles of my left calf and spurred my horse; but I shot the owner of that bayonet in the neck, and then went off with a loose rein down the hill, as old Tipperary had taught me how to do. A dozen bullets sang past me; but neither the Cid nor I was the worse for them.

I didn't draw up until a chestnut wood, studded with granite boulders as big as elephants, offered me some charming cover; and here I spent a pestilent cool evening for the time of the year. I reckoned on finding my man at our meeting-place: we had blundered through so many scrapes that I dare say I was a trifle presumptuous by this time in the demands I made of Dame Fortune. Not, however, as it turned out.

And so in the dead of night I groped back up the hill to the hermitage. But there was no sign of the fellow, and I confess I was annoyed. It seemed to me he deserved his fate if he had been killed in failing to do what I had done with such ease.

I gave him several minutes' grace, and then, stiff though my spiked leg was, decided to explore a little higher still. The horse I tethered at the back of the shrine, where Dermot would be sure to see it (and draw conclusions) if he arrived in my absence. A lame man indeed, I stumbled on and cursed the granite stones that troubled me in the dark.

But all was quiet save for the wind that moaned from the cold Estrellas to the west. A spark or two of light where Guarda's sentinels footed it under the old castle ruin were the only tokens that I was not alone here, these three thousand feet or so above the sea's level.

I crawled on till I was close to the hut of the unfortunate rascal of a Portuguese who had played us so evil a trick. The croak of a carrion crow here made me stop sharply and peer to the left, where two or three enormous chestnut-trees with hollow trunks made black blots on the hillside. I had noticed them twice that day; the second time, even in my scamper, I thought of them that at a man's worst there would be splendid cover for his back in one of them to help him to die. From the nearest of these trees something now swayed obscurely, and, looking at it, I saw another bird rise from it and spread its wings.

It was a hanged man, of course. Portugal and Spain had such decorations in plenty between 1808 and 1813.

My concern in this particular hanged man was to ascertain if it might be Dermot. But instead of Dermot it was Rusendo the Spaniard, and I had scarcely learnt this when another shape loomed out from a lower bough farther on. And this was the poor little Spanish girl, Rusendo's daughter!

Bad times they were to lead to such doings—bad enough to please the devil himself in his foulest humour!

I tried the other trees after this to see if my man might be a third tit-bit strung up for the Guarda

birds to sup on. But there was no Dermot; and then I cut down the bodies and stroked the cold cheeks of that poor maid whose fate might yet have been worse than it was. A parting in the clouds cast on the child's face a sulky light, which briskly flitted from it as if ashamed of marring for a moment her serene angel-expression. I covered her with chestnut leaves and twigs to keep the crows off until the morning, when it was to be hoped the Church would see to decent burial for both of them.

And Rusendo also I began to cover up, babes-in-the-wood fashion. But in the act of cutting more twigs I remembered his words about that black ball of hair of his. To be sure, the coiffing itself was only a toreador's fancy, to give him an individuality to catch the eye; but he had implied something more than that.

I stooped to his head, and, fumbling at the blob, produced a little metal effigy of a bull weighing about two ounces. This was all, and it was as of no more account than a silver snuff-box that I pocketed it and afterwards finished my task. In the meantime I had examined the cottage itself and found no trace of Dermot. And now that all was done that could be, I was for the shrine again and a brisk night-journey over the mountain into the Zezere valley.

But having returned to my Cid, here I found Dermot Lake as calm and usual as if he were just back from a mere five-mile ride for a rooster. He was handling my horse's legs, and his own horse stood by and approved his occupation.

'I'm glad to see you, my lad,' I said.

'Indeed, sir, and it's myself that was in spirits just now when I discovered your honour's charger. Belike it's no time now for explanations,' said he.

'No time at all. We must to horse and away,' said I. 'Hurt anywhere?'

He answered hesitatingly.

'No, sir—only my feelings. It's as an old woman I'm dressed, sir; and but for being able, by the grace of God, to split up her gown and reef it into a make-shift kind of breeches, it's a petticoated female I'd be this minute.'

Indeed, now that I looked at him more narrowly, he was an odd figure. But as he was sound in wind and limb, this was just nothing at all; and so off we moved up the hillside, leading our horses, and I mighty soon with little curiosity left in me about Dermot's adventure. My leg was crying for a bed to rest itself on, and the more I said to it 'Gee up!' the more heavily it moved. I was glad to mount when we had turned the ridge, and the rest of the descent, with the river bellowing in its gorge to the right, was no such torment. Our mounts fared badly, poor things! and with daybreak we changed them for a couple of broad-backed mules that brought us into Covilhã by breakfast-time. And here I joined Barnard's Rifles and got the blessing of medical comforts, and my man moulted his frock and could challenge the blue sky with his cocked nose as impudent as ever again.

As for his escape, there wasn't a deal in it. A clubbed musket had stretched him out while he stood rejoicing at my luck, and when his senses returned

he was in the Guarda lock-up, in his shirt and socks and never a thing else. If he'd been anything but an Irishman such a situation would have chilled the heart of him; but, being what he was, he set to work on the sensibilities of the moustached wife of his jailer (an ancient body), and with a hap'orth of blarney made putty of her. She not only gave him a file, but helped him to shift the bars of the window and lavished her wardrobe on him. Nor was that all either. She told him where his horse was stabled, and how he could get it. And all the reward she asked was the favour of his prayers on saints' days, and his promise that when the British army again cleared Guarda of the French he would do what he could for Maria Pereira.

Faith! she had her reward, honest creature. The last I heard of her she was a grandee in Lisbon, with a dozen nephews and nieces courting her for the money she had saved as cook to the British Minister there. The Duke managed that for her, as he managed so much else for the deserving small fry as well as the heroes in the land.

But to get on with my story as far as Rusendo the toreador has a hand in it. With a healed leg I found the Duke and gave him my news, with which he was moderately pleased.

'When are you going to get killed, Bill Buckingham?' he asked afterwards, as dry as dust. 'They talk about *my* life being charmed, but I couldn't have rushed that crowd in Guarda like you without picking up a few tiresome leaden friends. You're the most wonderful man in the Intelligence Department, not excepting Colonel Grant himself.'

As may be supposed, I thanked my lord for that compliment.

‘And the most lucky!’ he added, as if he meant it.

It was an inspiration that made me at that moment haul out the little golden bull which I had taken from the toreador’s head.

‘Has your lordship any fancy for trinkets like this?’ I said, seeing that for once he appeared to have a spare minute or two.

‘Very pretty,’ quoth he; ‘very neat,’ examining the article. ‘Whom did you kill for it?’

I’ll do the Duke the justice to say no one was more ready to apologise like a gentleman when he had misjudged a fellow-soldier. I told him the entire history of the thing; and then he gave me back the toreador’s talisman, and smiled.

‘I’m sorry, Buckingham. I wronged you just now,’ he said. ‘I eat my words to the last syllable of them. And keep your booty, man. Much obliged to you; but I’ve no room for such lumber. I’ve another kind of bull to get by the horns, and, egad, sir! it’s taking me all my time. Good-day to you, Captain Buckingham.’

After that it was just chance and a bad evening at piquet with Forrett of the Light Division which brought me to the most disappointing pitch of necessity that ever came even to one of the Tipperary Buckinghams, a family renowned for their chastenings at the hands of Providence.

I gave Forrett my I O U for the seven guineas I was short, and in the morning looked up Harky Hart, that sharp son of Jerusalem who made two fortunes between 1811 and 1816 as a camp-follower

and purchaser of things that had lost their proper owners.

He was called Harky for his way of prefacing an offer with a 'Harkee, captain!' 'Harkee, my lad!' and so forth, according to the quality of his customers.

Harky Hart was immediately interested in my bull when I had again related its little history.

'Now that, captain,' he said, 'is something like. It's gold, of a sort, and it's not ill-shaped. They bring me china vases six feet high and mirrors ten feet square, and, by Joshua! they grumble if I don't pay for 'em by the square inch when it costs me a fortune to keep the rubbish from being smashed to little pieces. I'll give you five guineas for this, captain, just because it's so small.'

I told the rogue I'd been offered ten. It was true, too; though Danby White made it a deucedly provisional offer: he'd give it me when we were both in England again.

'Harkee, captain!' said the rascal to this; 'it's broken. You can hear its ribs rattle. But I'll tell you what; I'll pay for it at three guineas the ounce, and that's full melting-price, or thereabouts.'

Out came his pocket scales, and with great grumbling Harky Hart handed me seven guineas and a quarter; and then he pulled his own nose as if he were possessed by immeasurable glee, and remarked:

'That was a very pretty story the poor bull-fighter told you, Captain Buckingham; but don't you think the Emperor of Morocco was making fun of him?'

'Faith! and it has occurred to me, Harky,' said I.

'Yes; and unless it was not so,' said he, hoisting a burning-glass to his eye and examining the bull, 'it is you who have made fun of me. I have given you a magnificent price. God grant I have not wronged myself and my dear little children at home!'

I hadn't finished laughing before the Jew waddled away, with many dubious shakes of the head. The idea of Harky Hart wronging any one except a client was too subtle for my sanity; and that evening I passed the joke along at dinner as something too good to keep, and the laugh went with it again. Only one fellow kept a steady countenance. It was Grimstone of the Engineers.

'I'll lay you an even guinea,' said Grimstone when we were quiet, 'that your talisman would have been cheap to Hart at a thousand guineas.'

'Take him, Bill,' cried Forrett; and, faith! I booked that wager as I booked so many others I'd no probability of proving.

'Right! I'll see Hart about it in the morning,' said Grimstone.

But in the morning there was no Harky Hart anywhere to be found or heard of. He had cleared off for Lisbon with an ambulance-party, and thus for the present there was an end of him.

And, egad! it wasn't a time with the rest of us to be thinking deeply about him or guinea-wagers either. Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria, San Sebastian, and Mars himself alone knew how many tough little affairs filled up our leisure. And I was never idle even when the rest were playing at winter quarters.

The allies were wonderful throughout these months and years, as all creation that matters to us knows full well; and the Duke was—himself, consistently.

This brings us to December 1813, St Jean de Luz, and a ball at the Hôtel de Ville which his worship the Mayor was good enough to give at the General's suggestion. I was at that ball, and so was Grimstone.

Of course there were mighty few ladies to help us along—eighteen, to be exact; and maybe three hundred of us officers. That was how Grimstone and I happened to be waltzing together.

Grimstone came prancing up to me when I was drinking a drop with Baysham of Lord Hill's division, and finely excited and amused he seemed.

'Will you give me the pleasure of a dance, Miss Buckingham, dear?' said he, with a monkey smile.

'After you've drunk something, Grim,' said I. 'And what's in the wind?'

He winked at the others.

'A very fine lady's in the wind, Miss Buckingham,' said he. 'I'm thinking you'll be as jealous as Jacob when you see how she glitters.'

With that I stopped his nonsense by taking his arm for the joke, and allowing him to lead me into the circle. Maybe my figure was not exactly lady-like, and, faith! it's not grieved I am to own it. I laughed as loud as the others, I did, when Grimstone slung his arm round my waist.

'Got a guinea about you, Bill?' he whispered, with another of his grins, ere we started.

'Not a franc,' said I. 'Why?'

'Tell you when you're winded,' said he; and away we whisked.

He continued his story when we were getting our breath, with our legs straight before us, sitting on the blue benches by the wall, with mirrors at our backs and a man serving champagne to us.

‘Seen Harky Hart?’ Grimstone asked.

‘Not since—you know when,’ said I.

‘No? Yet he’s about. His wife’s here too. I’ll introduce you. Come along.’

He jumped up and rudely enough stopped Brigadier Benson, who was passing with a guy of an old woman on his arm. But the Brigadier forgave him.

‘It’s all right. Don’t apologise,’ he said.—‘*Merci beaucoup, madame!*’ and with a brisk bow he released himself from this red-faced creature in white silk and feathers, with diamonds by the hundred about her, and one superb gem in her hair just below the feathers.

‘Baroness,’ said Grimstone, ‘my friend Captain Buckingham solicits the honour of an introduction.’

‘With pleasure, sir,’ cried she, all eagerness, smiles, and perspiration.

And then I made my bow, and was only half through it when I understood that it was Harky Hart’s wife to whom I was being presented. And then we all laughed. They were gay times as well as red times.

‘I’ll leave you,’ said Grimstone, ‘and by-and-by you’ll pay me my guinea.’

Before I could say another word the woman was astonishing me.

‘Captain Buckingham,’ she whispered, ‘what a beautiful romance it was about you and the diamond! My husband Reuben says he won’t have

the impudence to face you, but "Rubbish!" says I. "I'll tell him myself, and he'll behave like a true gentleman about it, as sure as my name's Susannah." This is it on the buckle of my plume.'

'I give you my word, madam,' said I, 'that I don't know what you're talking about.'

She laughed with the noise of a rocket.

'La, no,' she said; 'how simple of me not to remember! But it's nothing to your own simplicity, captain. My husband says so too, and, buss me! he *should* be a judge. Why, the diamond was in the little gold bull's stomach, if I may mention such a thing to a gentleman and an officer. Reuben guessed there was something good in it, and he found the opening, and—he's refused five thousand guineas in Bond Street for it. The best of it is, you haven't a claim on Reuben for another farthing! He bought us a title last year in one of those little German kingdoms that used to have kings each to 'em—so he says, Captain Buckingham; but that's between you and me and the looking-glass. But it's a sure thing he wouldn't have wasted his money on such extravagance if it hadn't a-been for the diamond. "It'd grace a princess, old woman," said he; and though I'm only forty-seven, captain, I wasn't offended for joy of thinking how my beauty was going to be adorned, and my name too.'

Grimstone had drifted back to us; he was fingering his chin and smiling.

I grasped misfortune with iron fingers and rose—I *hope* with the composure of a gentleman.

'You may mention me to your husband if you like, madam,' said I, 'and tell him that I have no

wish to excel in the more sordid arts of life. I bear him no malice. Your servant.'

And, faith! in ten minutes I was roaring with laughter about it, and telling the tale for all listeners. But it took some doing. And Grimstone's guinea was a painful trifle to hand over in such circumstances.

Thank God! the Buckinghams could no more outwit a fellow-creature like Harky Hart than they could fly with the old family manor-house tied to their boots!

'CRIF COLUMBUS.'

BY LOUIS TRACY.



H Crif!' cried the small boy when the topmost crab of a barrellful fell out on the fish-quay, and crawled stiffly amidst the rows of cod, haddock, and ling slowly gasping their lives away.

'What do you mean by that, Phil?' demanded his amused mother.

But a live crab and a squirming codfish were too immediately interesting to the small boy to permit him to speak; here was wonderland spread out before his big blue eyes. He had previously seen the sea only from the deck of a P. & O. steamer on the homeward voyage from India. Eyes, ears, and mouth were inadequate to-day; their utmost capacity would not permit each new sight and sound to be assimilated at once. Marvels abounded—gaily painted fishing-cobles, gloriously striped in red, white, and blue; lumbering fishermen in sou'-westers, oilskins, and big boots; stout old women in short skirts and knotted shawls; the auctioneer with his quick patter: 'Now-then; nice-lot-o'-whitin'. Who says two bob? Two-an'-three, two-an'-three, two-an'-six, two-an'-nine; three shillin'. Any advance on three? Mrs Verrill'—— Could it be expected that any youthful Briton, aged seven, would find time for mere words in the midst of this whirl of sensation?

The fish-market soon came to an end. The unwilling crabs and heedless fish were packed in crates and carried off to the railway station; and a man with a hose swabbed quay and loiterers with impartial skill.

So Phil and his mother walked away down the pier, to look at the great steamers turning close round the Nab, on the ocean highway 'twixt north and south. Then the small boy found speech.

'Do they all come from the island, mammy?' he asked.

'What island, dear, and what are you thinking of?'

'Don't you know?' he cried, with the quick petulance of childhood. 'I mean the island daddy told me about. A man named Crif Columbus once sailed out into the sea and found it. Daddy said that every man, when he's growed, goes out to look for an island. Some finds nice ones and some finds nasty ones; but everybody finds an island.'

'I wish daddy wouldn't talk such nonsense to you,' laughed Mrs Somers; whilst three ladies who were passing heard the boy's eager explanation, and agreed with each other that he was 'a dear little fellow.'

The tiny harbour was a delightful place, a narrow inlet pent within stone quays and jetties, with ropes and chains swinging from the low wooden rails, with steep ladders let into the huge tiers of masonry, and with flights of worn steps, bright yellow on top, and dark green where the tide washed them, leading to the strips of sand laid bare by the ebb. Fishing-cobles and smaller boats swung idly on the water.

Phil wondered how the men got into them, until he saw a white-haired fisherman pull steadily on a rope reeved through a block fastened to the stout railing, when, lo! one of the heavy boats commenced to move, all by itself, to the side of the pier. In half-a-minute it bumped against the stones beneath, and the fisherman, now holding both strands of the rope, let himself down into the coble. Then he untied a short cord which fastened the boat to the cable, got out the oars, and pulled rheumatically up the harbour until he disappeared beneath the swing-bridge.

So that was the way to do it, was it? Phil was deeply interested.

Mrs Somers had met a friend, and the two ladies gossiped.

'It is so delightful to be home again!' exclaimed Mrs Somers. 'We came back last year; but my husband was sent at once to the Transvaal, and all my plans were spoiled. I had so looked forward to a quiet life in England after eight years in India. But his battalion was ordered home two months ago, and here he is now, safe and sound. Philip retires as soon as peace is declared, so I really believe my troubles are ended.'

'I hope so, my dear,' agreed the other woman, 'though I am older than you, and I haven't reached that stage yet.'

'Mammy,' cried the small boy, 'where does the tide come from?'

'I am afraid I must follow your father's example and tell you it comes from the island,' she said smilingly.

Her companion took up the parable.

'The island out there is called Holland,' she said. 'Holland, where the Boers come from.'

'Oh!' said Phil, upon whom a great light broke suddenly.

Then the ladies fell to discussing the increasing difficulty of obtaining good servants.

At luncheon, in the big hotel on the cliff, Phil wrestled with a problem. At last he propounded it to his father.

'Daddy,' he said, 'if a man takes a Union-jack and sticks it on an island—after he finds the island, I mean—that is England, isn't it?'

Several people laughed.

'Pon my honour,' agreed the major, 'I don't think Mr Chamberlain could have stated the method more precisely.'

A sour-faced person, who was noted in the hotel by reason of his ostentatious perusal of the *Daily Messenger*, quoted severely: "'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings shall ye learn wisdom.'"

'You seem to have deferred the operation,' said Mrs Somers sweetly.

A grin went round the table.

'Your little boy is a smart youngster, no doubt, madam; but you would hardly contend that his policy should be that of Great Britain,' was the answer.

'My little boy has seen the British flag flying in so many parts of the world that he naturally believes in its power,' came the quick retort.

An American visitor broke in with a staccato comment: 'It appears to me that the only place where Englishmen are shy about waving the Union-jack is in England itself.'

Phil wondered why this cut-and-thrust argument had arisen so suddenly. His active brain was filled with a great undertaking, and he had no room for further thought. The day passed, and the child was so unusually thoughtful that his mother would have experienced some alarm were it not for the undiminished vigour of his appetite. At bedtime he explained that he might be 'hungry in the night.' With a smiling protest, Mrs Somers allowed his governess-nurse to give him a stock of apples and biscuits. Phil kissed them all 'good-night,' and snuggled up in his cot, whilst Major and Mrs Somers, followed by the maid a few minutes later, went to the saloon to hear the band.

They remained there two hours, and by chance the nurse accompanied them to the hotel. It was a fine evening, though dark, for there was no moon, and the heavy banks of cloud scurrying to the south-east showed that a stiff breeze was blowing from the land, though the town itself was screened by the high moors. The tide was going out. The sidelong glint of the toy lighthouses at the entrance to the harbour showed that there was yet sufficient depth of water to float any of the coasting craft or larger fishing-vessels which frequented the port. Many miles away, in the black void of the sea, an occasional tiny speck shone like a star. Mrs Somers knew that these were the mast-head lights of steamers.

'How strange it is,' she confided to her husband as they stood for a little while in the porch of the hotel to permit him to exhaust the better end of a cigar, 'to picture up beneath each of those glimmer-

ing dots the great hull of a vessel, full of men, machinery, and cargo, steadily ploughing its way through the pathless water, depending solely on a trembling needle in the compass, and regarding the mass of the land as we regard the ship: an invisible certainty, marked only by an occasional lantern !'

The soldier smiled. 'You are dreamy to-night,' he said. 'I know now where Phil gets his quaint fancies from.'

'By the way, that reminds me'——

A white-faced nurse rushed to them, fluttered and tremulous. Master Phil was not in his room. He had risen and dressed himself, taken his apples and biscuits, and no one knew where he was. Inquiry among the hotel servants made them no wiser. An agonised search of the corridors and public rooms elicited no new fact. Soon the whole cliff was aroused. Even the sour-faced gentleman was eager for tidings, and was the first to hint that the police should be informed. Mrs Somers, livid with anxiety, discovered that the boy had taken with him a Union-jack, purchased for sixpence a few days earlier, and her mother's heart suggested a tangible possibility. Phil's references to the island, the question he addressed to his father during lunch, put a dreadful idea into her mind. Perhaps he had gone down to the harbour and endeavoured to climb into a boat. Poor lady! she had not paid heed to the ways of fishermen. Even yet she was far from guessing the terrible truth.

Her surmise put the searchers on the right track. A policeman started the pier loungers on an investigation, and it was quickly discovered that the coble

Endeavour, No. 313 WY, was missing from her moorings. The men of experience scouted the idea that a boy aged seven—the child of a visitor—could have hauled the boat to the quay-side, slid down the ropes, and cast the coble loose.

‘Why, ma own bairn couldn’t ha’ done it,’ exclaimed the owner. Yet his own bairn was soundly thrashed on the following Tuesday for a successful effort.

Whatever the explanation, the *Endeavour* had vanished, and what was more, she must have drifted out to sea. The maritime population was rendered much more alert by this fact than by the disappearance of a youngster. The coble was worth over fifty pounds, and here was a frenzied stranger offering any money to those who found the boat, for Mrs Somers’s theory now possessed her husband.

Within five minutes half-a-dozen craft were manned and had hoisted their brown sails before the favouring wind, whilst a steam-tug was casting off from the wharf behind the bridge in response to the fierce energy of her stokers.

Out into the night they went, until a growing gale forced the cobs to run back for safety. They dropped in singly during the small hours, each with the same negative result. The town, cliffs, and sands had been scoured long since, and hope now centred in the efforts of the tug. At dawn she was sighted on the horizon, battling against heavy waves, but helped somewhat by the incoming tide. She drew near, and the chief officer of the Coastguard turned sympathetically to Major Somers, after a prolonged stare through a telescope.

'The coble has not been found, sir,' he said, 'nor have they any news, or they would have whistled long since.'

The unfortunate soldier waited until the steamer entered the harbour and answered the hail of a Coastguard-man; then he walked slowly and sadly to the hotel and put his arms around the sobbing woman he found there.

Phil was really surprised by the ease with which his adventure progressed. He was out of bed before his nurse quitted the hotel. He dressed himself quite carefully in his sailor-suit, secured his store of provisions, grasped his Union-jack and a toy sword, and waited a favourable opportunity to slip out of the hotel unseen, by way of the servants' door.

After that he had no difficulty whatever. The particular coble he selected for his enterprise was moored close to an unfrequented pier. At first it seemed that the heavy boat would never yield to the pull of his sturdy little arms; but it is in pulling that a child can exert its maximum strength, and at last the *Endeavour* began to creep close to the wall. It was ever so far beneath, and very dark down there; but the brave soul never faltered. He tied flag and sword to the white cord of his whistle, grasped both ropes, and essayed the descent. He learned immediately that the rough stones might be made to serve as steps with the support of the rope. Really this was so simple that nurse might do it, though she was so dreadfully afraid of sliding down banisters. The knot, too, that tied the rope in the

boat to the cable stretched across the harbour could be unfastened as quickly as a shoe-lace. All you had to do was to pull the end, and—behold!—you were off.

The coble soon caught the pace of the tide, and drifted out into the fairway. Her mast was not lowered, and her sail lay all ready for hoisting. Her heavy oars rested along the thwarts, and a six-foot rudder-board was placed close to the stern. Phil neither knew the nature of this appliance nor could he ship it were he a fisherman's son; but the sail and oars he quite understood. By hauling at a rope with all his might the heavy canvas began to rise, and the wind, getting beneath, helped the efforts of the youthful navigator.

By this time the coble was nearing the entrance to the harbour, and several people who saw the boat and noted the slow hoisting of the sail imagined that some fishermen were going out, though the observers were surprised, as it was a Saturday night.

Soon the *Endeavour* was travelling at a spanking pace. Try as he might, Phil could not get the sail higher than one-third of the way up the mast, and it bellied out in front like a flying-jib. At last he fastened the rope to a seat, and tried to mend matters by hauling on another rope fastened to the bottom of the sail. But, in the absence of the rudder, this manœuvre only served to slue the boat round on to the port tack, and caused her to heel over considerably. After scaring himself somewhat, Phil decided to let the sail behave in its own way, and the coble promptly straightened herself before the wind. The child did not know that his attempt to control the

heavy sheet probably saved his life. Right in the track of the speedy craft lay the Bell Buoy and a huge reef. His chance deflection of the course carried him safely past these obstacles; and now, indeed, he was bound direct for the 'island of Holland,' distant two hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies.

The *Endeavour* was, of course, a splendid sea-boat, roomy, deep, high forward, and well ballasted with heavy stones. The extraordinary manner in which her sail was set kept her straight before the wind, and also kept her nose well down. At two miles from the coast Phil looked back and saw the rows of lamps on the saloon, the small red lanterns that marked the two piers, and the two great eyes of the lighthouses lower down the coast marking the headland round which the steamers turned. Suddenly these latter, being red like those on the piers, became white. Now, wasn't that funny? Of all the odd things a boy could see, this rapid change in colour of the big lamps was the oddest!

Then he heard a loud splash in front. It couldn't be the island! Perhaps it was a fish! Was he already among the cods and the crabs? Oh, this was fine! What a story he could tell to daddy when it was all over, and the British flag waved over the Boers! The splashes became regular and angry, for the *Endeavour* hit the rising sea viciously. Alongside the racing boat, driven forward now as no fisherman would have cared to drive her, white things jumped up quickly and vanished in the darkness. Once the coble dipped heavily, and a cloud of spray dashed over her, drenching the child to the

skin. It was very cold. What a pity he had not brought his overcoat! Mother always told him to take an overcoat if the weather threatened to be bad; but it was quite fine when he left the hotel.

How far was it to the island?

Four miles from land the *Endeavour* was exposed to the full force of wind and wave. Any ordinary boat would have needed bailing by this time; but the gallant coble was scarcely wetted throughout, so beautiful were her lines and so high her prow.

At last the whistling of the gale, and the crash with which the boat ploughed her way through opposition which the rig of her sail would not permit her to climb, awoke in the child an uneasy consciousness that things were not right. He looked shoreward again. The white lights of the headland were dimly visible through the spindrift snatched from the surface of the sea. All the other lights had vanished. Then there came to him from out the trembling darkness the demon of doubt; and with doubt came fuller remembrance. His daddy had said that a man always found the island 'when he was growed.' Phil was not growed yet. Perhaps little boys never found an island; and mammy must have missed him by this time. Could he ever get back to her? How should he control this leaping, quivering thing, darting so fast into the awful mystery of night and ocean that already the lamps on shore had passed from sight? But his was a brave little heart. With desperate fingers he strove to undo the knot which fastened the sail-rope to the seat. He failed. The spray and the stiff strain of the mast had welded the strands in a manner

that would have defied a sailor. A knife alone could solve the difficulty.

'Oh Crif!' he cried when he realised that he was helpless.

Of death the child knew nothing. He understood quite clearly that his father had been engaged in a war in which men fought and were killed; but the words had no real meaning for him. When he slew a tin soldier with a wooden shell from a spring cannon, the stricken warrior was soon fit for duty again. But to be dead—to cease to be—was a possibility not within the cognisance of his busy existence. Nevertheless, with a new-born fear of the unknown in his heart, he recalled his mother's words: 'Whenever you are in sorrow or suffering, Phil, you must learn to pray. As you grow older, the more need you will have of God's help. You cannot begin too soon to ask for it.'

So now he sank on his knees, close to the seat to which he had been clinging, and his childish voice mingled with the rush of the wind and the clatter of the restless water. His repertoire was limited. It consisted solely of the Lord's Prayer, followed by a set formula: 'God bless daddy. God bless mammy. God bless me, their little boy.'

Then a fierce blast rushed madly upon the *Endeavour*, a wave rose up under her graceful bows, and the pressure of the gale combined with the resistance of the sea to snap the iron ring of the pulley at the top of the mast. Away flew the sail over the fore-part of the boat. The yard dropped into the water and checked the coble's way as a powerful brake stops an engine. More than this,

she instantly swept round before the wind, and for one dreadful moment Phil was in the very jaws of death. But the blind god refused to strike, and the *Endeavour* was not swamped as she lay broadside on. Then she turned her lofty prow to the pursuing giants; and Phil, to his thinking, was in worse case than ever, for clouds of spray spat at him, wetted him, and chilled him to the bone.

His prayer being ended, he felt that he deserved better of Providence, and, being of true British stock, decided to help himself somewhat. The present position of the big canvas sheet converted it into an awning spread over one-third of the splendidly built boat. With some skin-rubbings and nasty bumps, Phil managed to crawl forward until he was under this friendly shelter, and the sudden shutting off of the keen blast made him feel quite warm by contrast. With that, being in good heart, his faith in the nearness of the 'island' revived, and he tackled an apple and two biscuits.

Most happily, the wind decreased in force; but with the turn of the tide arrived a fresh peril. The two monsters were now snarling at each other, and each half-hour the waves grew higher. As if in derision of the inferior fiends who must obey his behests, the wind beheaded them, with the result that the *Endeavour*, suiting herself with admirable precision to each vagary of her adversaries, nevertheless shipped a quantity of water. It swished about in ever-increasing volume, reaching Phil's nook at each dip of the boat's nose, and making him miserably cold once more. The increasing rocking, too—or was it the apple?—brought on sickness. Then the

poor little fellow broke down, and gurgled piteous appeals for his mother to come and help him.

The hours passed. Half-dead with fright, sickness, and exposure, and with some chance of being suffocated by the forward rush of the many gallons of water now aboard, the boy did not notice the gray light which rendered dimly visible the leaping stern of the *Endeavour*, nor the steely blue expanse of ocean which came into view when the cruel rush of water gave him a momentary breathing-space.

Then all at once the motion of the boat became markedly less. Even he, numb with misery, felt that this was so. A vague memory lit up his wearied eyes. Could this be the island at last? Something fell into the coble with a bang. He saw four queer-looking hooks, all turned outwards and fastened in the middle, with a rope attached to the iron shank. The hooks jumped up, and two of them gripped a seat. The *Endeavour* went bump, bump, bump with her side; and, peeping out, Phil saw a great iron wall sticking up out of the water, and big round balls like knotted ropes bobbing up and down in the effort to keep the boat from striking the iron wall.

Good gracious, what a queer sort of island!

The boy was about to crawl stiffly out from beneath his shelter when another odd thing happened. A man—a big, oilskinned, bearded man—dropped into the boat from nowhere, and began to lash some stout tackle to the after-part. Was he a Boer? Phil crept out, and the man saw him.

'Well, I'm ——!' shouted the man.

Phil thought this was a very rude remark.

The man came towards him, and bent down to peer under the sail.

'Are there any more of you in there?' he roared; but Phil, who knew a great number of big men, realised that the voice was a kind one.

The boy tried to speak; but his tongue was swollen with salt and thirst, and he failed. All at once, too, he felt very tired and sleepy. The huge iron wall fell on top of him and the coble and the roaring sea, and crushed all things into a blank. He knew no more until he woke up in a nice little room, spotlessly white and clean, with several funny-looking clocks, and one quite extraordinary object right over his head—it was beautifully painted in black and red, and had points sticking out on all sides. On top of one of them was a crown, and all the others had letters, whilst the two hands moved at the same time, only much more quickly than those of a clock.

'Well, kid, are you better?' said somebody.

Phil looked at the speaker. His twenty-one days' experience of the P. & O. told him instantly that he was on board a ship, and that this was the captain.

'Right as a nail,' he replied. People always laughed when he said this, and the answer did not fail in its usual effect.

'Oh, are you? Then perhaps you can tell us where you came from. Were you alone on board that boat?'

Phil was conscious of a great soreness in his tongue.

'Why does my mouf hurt me so?' he inquired.

'That's nothing. Give him a drink of coffee, Simpson.'

Then the boy felt that another man, a steward, raised him in the bed and held a cup to his lips. He sucked in the contents like a sponge.

'Here!' cried the captain. 'Go easy, my young spark. Now, see if you can talk.'

By degrees the master of the steamship *Esther*, bound from Rotterdam to Hartlepool in ballast, heard the full, true, and particular account of the voyage of the *Endeavour*, which sailed from England the previous night, with a crew of one, the object of the crew being to plant the Union-jack on the island of Holland.

Most fortunately, the gallant coble herself was at that moment safely housed on the deck of the *Esther*, and the 'crew,' when his clothes were dry, was outrageously petted by the entire ship's company.

A few minutes after a certain post-office on the Yorkshire coast opened for business on the Sunday evening, the following telegram was received, addressed to the Chief of Police:

'The coble *Endeavour*, No. 313, of your port, was picked up at 5.30 A.M. to-day, seventeen miles S.E. by E. of Whitby. Boy on board named Phil Somers, aged seven. Kindly communicate with parents. Boy quite uninjured. Will be well looked after until receipt of instructions.—WILLIAM ERSKINE, Master s.s. *Esther*, West Hartlepool Docks.'

Next day, when Phil was brought to the hotel by his father and mother, he was lionised to an extent that might have turned many an older head. But he had seen that in his mother's face which awed him; and once, when he caught her weeping,

he burst out in passionate protest that he would never, never do such a thing again.

A week later the sour-faced man, relaxing for a moment, handed him a huge box. Inside it was a most remarkable model of the *Endeavour*, and Phil promised his parents and the donor that any experiments made with the craft would be conducted under strict supervision.

'After all is said and done, Philip,' said Mrs Somers to her husband, 'you are to blame. You should not fill the child's head with such nonsense.'

THE END.

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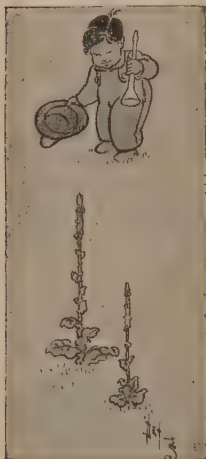
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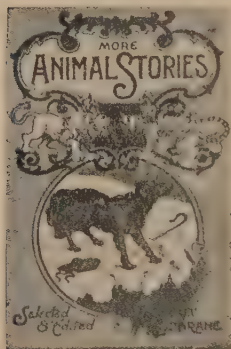
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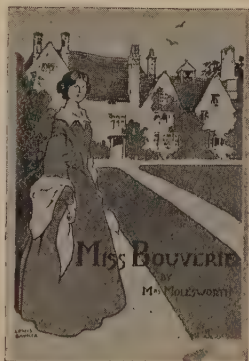
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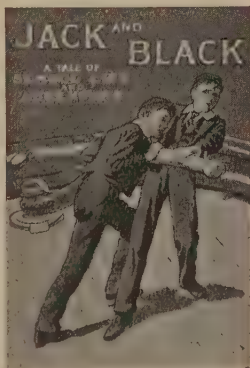
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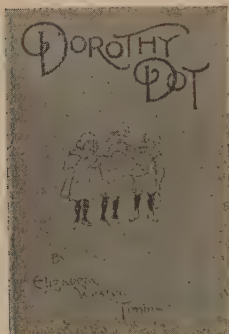
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